THE LONG ROAD TO BAGHDAD

EDMUND CANDLER

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THE LONG ROAD TO BAGHDAD

Photo: Elliott and Fry.

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR CHARLES TOWNSHEND, K.C.B.

The Long Road to Baghdad

By

EDMUND CANDLER
Late Official "Eye-Witness" in Mesopotamia

With 19 Maps and Plans and 16 Half-tone Plates

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In Two Volumes
VOLUME I

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To my brother

HENRY CANDLER

PREFACE

THE greater part of this book was written on the scene of the actions described. Very little could be published at the time about the doings and sufferings of our Army in Mesopotamia and our relations with the people of the country; for though an official "Eye-Witness" was appointed, he was always judiciously gagged. From the beginning the Censorship was a source of mystification to our troops; it provoked anger and mirth in an equal degree. Obscurity became a tradition; and the Censorship seemed to exist more as a nursery of convenient assumptions than as a screen to hide our preoccupations from the Turk. Not only was the darkness and secrecy about the military and political situation maintained when we had a great deal to hide; it was continued when things were going exceptionally well. Under the circumstances I have derived a certain satisfaction from the writing of this narrative in which nothing has been glossed over. Although I was the official "Eye-Witness" in Mesopotamia, there is little in these volumes that is officially inspired. I saw the campaign through the eyes of the Army, and I hope to perpetuate its verdict.

In re-reading some of the earlier chapters many months after they were written I have discovered a morbid vein. If, in turning out one's kit after a campaign, one were to come on a whiff of iodoform from a garment packed in hospital, it would give one the same sort of

shock, reviving sickly memories, abhorrent to sanity whether in body or mind. One should dwell on the glory of war, not cry over its death and wounds. My instinct was to correct those passages, to rewrite them in the healthy traditional vein. The only muse whom the self-respecting historian of war may invoke reigns in a sphere where mortality is held of no account. But the fighting in Mesopotamia from January to the end of April, 1916, was not like any other fighting British troops have had to undergo. What I saw was an army wasted in detail, expiating the folly of statesmen and generals in a struggle in which blunder piled upon blunder made it evident to the troops that their sacrifice was in vain. And not merely in vain, but, as it seemed at the time, thankless. For the force which fought to relieve Townshend, and suffered something like a complete reincarnation in the ordeal, were ill-fed, ill-equipped, and their sick, in many cases, untended. Looking back, I see that an elegiac, rather than a lyric strain, was natural in a non-combatant witness of a tragedy which has no parallel in our military history. So I have left the mournful passages uncorrected. There is more truth in them as they stand.

As regards strategy and tactics, I have never placed my uninstructed opinion before that of men whose profession is war. In every point I have consulted soldiers whose judgment I trust. But the practice of war is judged from more different angles than any other science. Not only is there a difference of opinion as to how a particular action ought to be fought; there is often complete disagreement as to how it was fought, and this among officers who took part in the engagement, as well as among Staff officers responsible for the operations. It is the lay historian's business to discover the least common

multiple of truth in this conflicting evidence. Dujaila, Sannaiyat, and Mahomed Abdul Hassan are themes of eternal controversy, and there is probably not an action described in this book which will not call forth a contradiction from somebody. Very different sometimes is the verdict of regiments which have gone into action side by side—more especially in the case of failure; and spectators watching a battle from the same point will carry away a different story.

Owing to ill-health I missed the operations on the Tigris and the Shatt-el-Adhaim immediately after the capture of Baghdad. My account of this fighting has been written after consultation with regimental officers and brigade, divisional, and corps Staff officers. The local perspective of the battalion is concentrated too much on a single point; and the wider perspective of the Staff is too general and comprehensive for the detailed picture. One perspective is the complement of the other. But descriptions of battles compiled at second hand must always be wanting in life. The non-military reader may find the narrative of these operations a little tedious after the dramatic events that preceded them.

The list of officers to whom I am indebted for verification, criticism, and information is a very long one, and it is impossible to give their names. For photographs my thanks are due to Mrs. Kennion, General Peebles, Lieut.-Colonel Berryman, Majors Power, Raymond, and Bastow.

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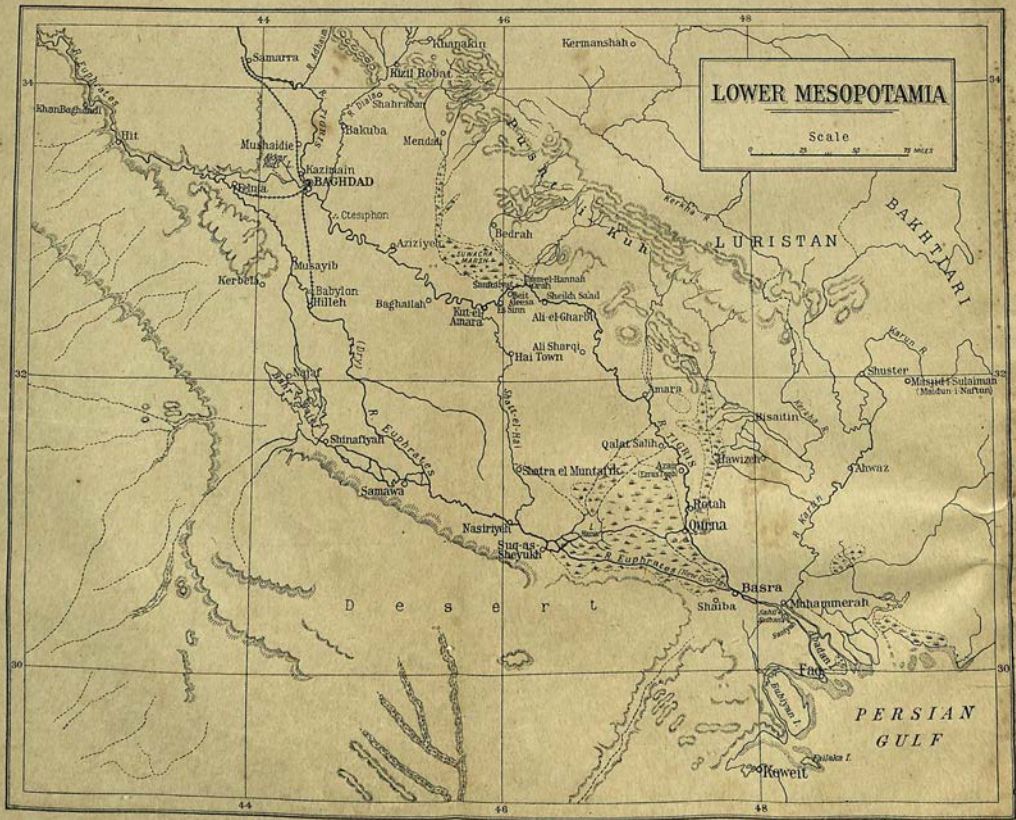
LOWER MESOPOTAMIA
Scale
0 25 50 75 MILES
Khanaqin
Kermanshah
Samarra
Kizil Robat
Shahraban
Khan Baghdadi
Bakuba
Mendali
Mushaidie
Kazimain
BAGHDAD
Diala R.
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Aziziyeh
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LURISTAN
BAKHTIARI
Musayib
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Babylon
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Kut-el-Amara
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Ali Sharqi
Hai Town
Sheikh Saad
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Shuster
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Shatra el Muntafik
Hawizeh
Ahwaz
Shinafiyah
Samawa
Nasiriyah
Suq-as-Sheyukh
Rotah
Qurna
Basra
Shaiba
Mohammerah
Fao
PERSIAN GULF
Kuweit
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THE LONG ROAD TO BAGHDAD

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

My story of the long road to Baghdad covers three laps of the Mesopotamian campaign. It begins with the advance of the Relieving Force from Ali Gharbi; the first milestone is the fall of Kut; the second, the capture of Samarrah; the third, the armistice and the surrender of the Turkish Army at Shergat Ali. To the soldier our entry into Baghdad was a mere incident in the advance. Logically, and from a military point of view, a history of the expedition up to the fall of the city must include the operations by which we secured and consolidated our hold on it, the defeat of the enemy's two Corps on the Shatt-el-Adhaim and the Tigris, and the capture of his railhead at Samarrah. Some of the stiffest fighting in the campaign was ahead of our troops when they entered Baghdad on March 11th. The story of our advance on the city and the later operations will be told in the second volume. The first volume ends with the hot weather after the fall of Kut. It covers the tragic part of the history and the long period of preparation before our troops were in a position to make good.

The policy of penetrating Mesopotamia, in the first place, beyond the Shatt-el-Arab and Karun was of doubt-

ful wisdom. Once established at Qurna and Amara, we were in a position to protect the Anglo-Persian Oilfields and to safeguard the Gulf. Political reasons were urged for going on; but it is a sound axiom that political reasons should wait upon strategical, since they are ultimately decided by them. In Mesopotamia the penalty exacted for the reversal of this order was the more heavy as our policy was one of opportunism. The objects pursued in our advance were vaguely defined by Mr. Asquith in the House of Commons (November 2nd, 1915) as being "to secure the neutrality of the Arabs" and "generally to maintain the authority of our Flag in the East." If we had had any clear vision at the start of what we proposed to do and where we proposed to stop we might have provided adequate means and resigned ourselves to the sacrifice of man-power and war-material elsewhere. But our aims were undefined. We were drawn on headily from Qurna to Amara, from Amara to Kut, and from Kut to Ctesiphon. There was a complete lack of perspective in the co-ordination of our resources with our aims. Our grasp at Baghdad in November, 1915, without the transport to convey our reinforcements to the front when they arrived, *is* impossible to defend. It was the old story of vague and ill-considered policy, dissipation of resources, vacillation and compromise in the essential and ultimate thing, blind and bull-necked confidence in the immediate means to the end.

In his speech of November 2nd Mr. Asquith told the House of Commons that we were "within measurable distance of Baghdad." At the same time a marked uneasiness became apparent in the German Press, an uneasiness that might have awakened our suspicions. For the Hun, more even than ourselves, minimises the importance of a reverse, and is tardy in his recognition of it, if indeed he gives it publicity at all. And here

he was crying out before he was hit at our near approach to Baghdad, as if the city were on the point of falling. All the while he and the Turk must have been confident that the small force we had on the Tigris, a single division, nearly 500 miles from its base, would never reach its objective. It was known that our reinforcements had not yet left France, and any serious opposition, a single, stubbornly contested action, would leave us too weak to hold the city even if we captured it. What the Hun really feared was that we should desist, that our eyes should be opened in time to our relative resources, and that we should turn round and walk away from the mouth of the trap. But it was like us to go on. An intelligent student of British history and character might have predicted it. We have never shown any sense of proportion in the means to the end. We were true to type when we advanced with one depleted division to attack the second capital of an Empire which on all its frontiers could command an army of 700,000 fighting men.

But we wanted Baghdad. The city was an irresistible lodestar. It would be a set-off to Gallipoli. To hold it would save the wavering East. Persia, Afghanistan, the tribesmen on our frontier would settle down into amiable neutrality or friendship, and the menace of internal disruption in India would be removed. Our line of communications lengthened out to nearly 500 miles; our transport was lamentably insufficient; we were a mere handful, 14,000 rifles at the most; but we wanted Baghdad very badly, and we were British and they were only Turks. At Ctesiphon we were but eighteen miles from the city, and the public at home were already weighing the fish in their net. Great was their surprise and indignation when the monster wobbled and floundered through with great damage to the mesh.

The culpability of everyone has been apportioned,

though not with entire justice, in the findings of the Mesopotamia Commission. Politically Kut was a national disgrace—the more so because it is a name of imperishable glory in the annals of our Army. In the findings of the Mesopotamia Commission the greatest weight of blame was thrown upon Sir John Nixon, who was the main inspiration, the constant stimulus in every step of the advance. The magnificent way in which he overcame difficulties and defeated odds, the long series of victories for which he was repeatedly thanked by Government and the King, were forgotten. His failure alone was grasped. His lack of vision, his incapacity to see beyond the immediate field, his rash impetuosity, his spirit of blind and confident optimism were recorded in cold judgment. Yet these qualities, dangerous and fatal as they proved, and directly responsible for the catastrophe, have earned other commanders, on whom fortune has smiled, fame instead of obloquy. General Nixon's Staff still believe that Baghdad was within his grasp, that he was the victim of mischance, that if he had been a day earlier he could have taken it and held it until the two new divisions arrived from France. They maintain that his intelligence was good, but that his aeroplanes broke down the last two days, and that he did not get news of the fresh division which arrived by a forced march the night before the battle and saved the Turks from a complete rout.

The defenders of General Nixon dwell on the persistency with which his demands were refused. But this does not exculpate him from responsibility. He may have been within an ace of taking Baghdad, but had he taken it he could not have held it against the Turkish reinforcements from Mosul and Aleppo; for, as events proved, sufficient transport did not exist in the country to convey our own reinforcements, when they arrived, to the scene of action.

The Army's sympathies will be with the man who took the risk, however wrongheadedly, and failed, rather than with the officials who sanctioned and encouraged an adventure which their own niggardliness had starved into impotence. Most soldiers agree that Nixon was ungenerously treated. But this narrative takes up the history of the campaign after the great blunder had been committed; it affords one more example of the magnificent way we English take our thwackings. If we suffer the rebuffs of the spoilt child we profit by the unsparing application of the rod. No people are so chastened and hardened by the castigation they bring upon themselves. Unfortunately the strokes earned by the general and the politician descend upon the backs of the captain, the subaltern, and the private soldier. And right valiantly they bear them. We are a race of captains. The average regimental officer is as worthy of canonisation as St. George. But we have no large vision or sense of direction. We lay waste our powers. Put the budding St. George at the top of the tree, and in a few months it will be generally agreed that he ought to be hanged there.

Mesopotamia produced two generals, Townshend and Maude. One was sacrificed to our system. The other, seizing the opportunities provided by a nation's indignation and spirit of atonement, made good. The historic situation in which England periodically finds herself was repeated: shock at the discovery that great means are necessary for great ends, and, following the shock, the reaction into thoroughness of preparation and lavishness of expenditure when it is too late, or almost too late—too late, at any rate, to make good the drainage of our best blood.

The whole tragedy of Mesopotamia hinged upon the decision to advance from Kut-el-Amara. It was a mistake with the resources at our command to have gone

beyond Qurna. The two main objectives, to secure the mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab and to safeguard the Persian oilfields, had been attained. If we were out for the big thing and were going to supplant the Turk in the City of the Caliphs and impress the East, we should have started with an army of at least 40,000 men and built a railway behind them, we should have trebled and quadrupled our transport on the river, and made adequate provision for the supply of commissariat, equipment and munitions. But the Government of India neglected and starved the expedition from the beginning. Simla maintained her complacent academic attitude in the clouds, detached from all contact with life, blinking at unpleasant realities, and trusting to luck that the troops in the field would pull her through and save her face. Baghdad till the last moment was an open problem. Its capture would have been a resounding political triumph. And there were strong hopes. Force "D" had achieved the impossible at Shaiba, Nasiriyeh, Kut-el-Amara; Baghdad itself was only one more impossibility. Yet all the while the troops who were working the miracle were treated in a peddling and parsimonious spirit.

Ignorance was at the root of the evil rather than callousness or indifference. For the system could not be purged in a day, or the habit of mind that grows out of it—a habit that is as content with the image of things as with the substance, that is always weighing and appraising, suspecting, doubting, evading responsibility and consigning live issues to the slow death of compromise. Every soldier in Mesopotamia cursed the bureaucrat individually. But the anger of those who sit in judgment should be more impersonal. Such a system was bound to fail in an emergency in which promptness of decision, far-sightedness, uncompromising action, lavishness of expenditure were called for. The odds are that

the same thing would have happened under any Indian administration during the last twenty years.

The argument that India was exhausted by what she had already given does not excuse her. No one denies her splendid contributions to the Western Front. The blunder was that, being exhausted, she muddled on towards Baghdad. The lack of prevision and provision that doomed Townshend almost dragged the Relieving Force to its death. For if the 6th Division was insufficiently equipped it can be imagined how the three new Divisions fared. At Ctesiphon, as at Scutari in the old Crimean days, the sick were nursing the sick, and the dying the dying; yet when the 7th Division came upstream ahead of their medical plant and personnel and fought the battles of Sheikh Saad, the Wadi, and El Hannah, there were no new ambulances to take in the 9,000 casualties, and there was not a hospital boat on the river. The Force was doubled, or trebled, on paper, yet the requirements vital to its effectiveness did not exist in fact; and they could not be created by a nod of the head or a stroke of the pen.

In February, 1916, the War Office took over charge from the Government of India, but it was a slow business building up the sinews of the Force. This narrative will show how our blunders were expiated in the end—vicariously, in accordance with the inexpiable decree. Yet in one respect Providence smiled on the Expedition. It was shortsighted of the Turk to take his measure of us from the months that preceded the surrender of Kut. The reverse he dealt us should have put him on his guard; it should have increased his vigilance rather than relaxed it. The Hun, at least, should have known that we are most dangerous when we are hardest hit. But the Turk's head was swollen with insolence and contempt. He left a force of a bare 17,000 rifles to hold us on the Tigris, with possible reinforcements of 5,000

within call. Had we inspired him with respect he would have barred the way more effectually. Thus our very blunders before Kut helped us through to Baghdad.

It is unnecessary here to enumerate the deficiencies in the medical and supply services, in transport and guns, or to discuss the division of blame. Details enough will be found in the Report of the Mesopotamia Commission to satisfy the most exacting critic of the military administration. But a very brief abstract of the events of the campaign up to the advance from Ali Gharbi is necessary before we take up the story from that point.

CHAPTER II

FROM FAO TO CTESIPHON

THE Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force left India on October 16th and 18th, 1914, to rendezvous at Bahrein. It was known that Turkey was only waiting for a favourable opportunity to declare war. The first message of the gathering storm was received by H.M.S. *Espiègle* on the Shatt-el-Arab (October 7th, 1914), when a curiously worded letter in Turkish and English was brought on board: "Please you leave the Shatt before 24 hours." On the 13th the Turks warned the ship again to leave within eight days; after that any attempt to pass through would be opposed by force of arms. In spite of these warnings, the *Espiègle* remained in the Karun River guarding British interests and property at Muhammerah and the Anglo-Persian Oil Company's works at Abadan. In the second week in October the Turks began to fortify their bank of the river. Earthworks were erected and guns mounted on Dabba Island. On October 30th all ships left the Shatt-el-Arab, the *Espiègle* alone remaining. At midnight on the 31st news came through by wireless that hostilities had begun.

On the morning of November 6th the first transports of the Expeditionary Force, at that time a single brigade, escorted by H.M.S. *Odin*, crossed the bar; the *Odin* engaged the Turkish battery of 15-pounder Krupp guns, and silenced it, and a naval and military party landed and occupied Fao fort and town. The Turkish infantry decamped at an early stage, and we did not lose a single man.

The first troops disembarked on the afternoon of November 8th at Saniyeh, two miles upstream from Abadan. At Abadan they met the *Espiègle*. She had anchored here to protect the oilworks and had been exposed to heavy rifle fire; but the oilworks were intact and the company's employees safe. During the night of the 10th-11th the Turks attacked the camp, but were driven off, leaving eighty dead and wounded on the ground. After this the enemy took up a position about four miles away in the tract known as Saihan; here they were attacked by General Delamain's Brigade on November 15th and routed with heavy loss. On November 14th General Barrett landed at Saniyeh and took over command. Our force now amounted to a complete Division. The main advance began at dawn on the morning of the 17th. The same day the enemy were driven out of their trenches in the action at Sahil which determined the evacuation of Basra.

Sahil was a very brilliant affair. The Turks opposed us in a strong position with 5,000 men and twelve guns. We attacked with two brigades, one field and two mountain batteries, two squadrons of cavalry and two companies of sappers and miners. The brunt of the assault fell on Delamain's Brigade, which was ordered to turn the enemy's left, while the 18th Brigade (General Fry) engaged the enemy's right and centre in a frontal attack. This manœuvre was successful. The Dorsets led the assault very gallantly, exposed to a terrific enfilade fire. Soon after one in the afternoon the Turks rose in a cloud from their trenches and scattered. The heavy ground and the mirage hindered pursuit, but we captured two mountain guns. The enemy were so shaken in this action that they decided to abandon Basra.

On November 19th the fleet silenced the guns that commanded the obstruction of sunken ships the Turks had thrown across the river from the left bank to Dabba

Island. On November 21st they discovered a passage through the barrier, and at 5 P.M. they reached Basra. The Turks had all left; the place was given over to loot; the custom house and warehouses were in flames; and the *Espiègle* and the *Odin* were just in time to secure the lives and property of Europeans.

On November 25th the *Odin* and *Espiègle*, with the armed launches *Miner* and *Mashona*, made a reconnaissance upstream as far as Qurna and confirmed the report that the Turks were reassembling there. On December 2nd a column was sent up the river to deal with the force. It consisted of the 104th Wellesley's Rifles and 110th Mahrattas, a double company of the Norfolks, a section of sappers and miners, four field guns, two mounted on steamers, the *Espiègle*, *Odin*, *Lawrence* and the armed launches *Miner* and *Shaitan*. Colonel Frazer was in command. On December 3rd the Turks were driven from the village of Mazeera on the left bank opposite Qurna; but during the night they received strong reinforcements, and operations had to be postponed until December 6th, when General Fry arrived with the 120th Infantry, 7th Rajputs, the remainder of the Norfolks, a field and a mountain battery. On the 7th Mazeera, from which we had withdrawn on the night of the 3rd, was again stormed and carried; the Turkish trenches were cleared all along the left bank, and the enemy withdrew across the river. On the morning of the 8th the 104th and 110th Regiments, with two mounted guns, effected a crossing higher upstream.[1]

During the night those of the garrison who had not escaped up the river in boats surrendered. We captured Subhi Bey, late Wali of Basra, 1,034 prisoners of war and four guns. The fall of Qurna left the British in exclusive control of the delta, the passage to the Euphrates, and the navigable waterway of the Gulf.

[1] Some details of this action are given in Chapter XXII.

After the capture of Qurna no important action was fought until the defeat of the Turks at Shaiba on April 12th, 13th, 14th. The enemy's forces were now disposed on the three rivers, his right on the Euphrates, his centre on the Tigris, his left on the Karun. For five months the Tigris front was quiet save for a reconnaissance in force (January 20th) to the enemy's position at Rotah, where a force of some 5,000 Turks and Arabs had established themselves seven miles north of our camp. Early in February we heard that another mixed force of Turks and Arabs were descending on Ahwaz from Amara by Bisitin and Illah. Ahwaz, in Persian Arabistan, lies within the territory of our ally, the Sheikh of Muhammerah. Had we allowed the Turks to overrun this tract with impunity it would have meant the defection of the tribes who remained loyal to the Sheikh, and most probably the open hostility of the Bakhtiari and a general conflagration in Western Persia, entailing the loss of the oilfields and the pipe-line to Abadan. Thus, though we could ill afford to split up our forces at the time, it became a paramount political necessity to send troops to the Karun.

A brigade was left on the Karun front to contain the enemy forces that threatened Ahwaz. This hostile gathering consisted of eight Turkish battalions, eight guns, and some 10,000 Arab auxiliaries. An offensive was out of the question, for the Turks were concentrating on the Euphrates, and it became abundantly clear that their main attack was going to be delivered from this side. During February, March, and the first half of April our position in Mesopotamia was far from secure. The Turks could raise double the force that we could command, their reinforcements were nearer, and they were preparing the most determined thrust by which they hoped to recapture Basra. Had they delivered their stroke earlier they might have

succeeded. The decisive engagement was fought at Shaiba, some ten miles west by south of the port, and separated from it by inundations through which the troops had to wade or paddle or punt in native craft. The situation on April 12th was critical. The Turks made four separate attacks in great strength, all of which were repulsed. In the evening the garrison was reinforced by the 30th Brigade, just arrived from Egypt under General Melliss, who took over command. On April 13th the enemy was surrounding the camp on all but the flooded side, and no more reinforcements could be sent through. General Melliss therefore decided to take the offensive; the infantry advanced with great *élan*, and by evening the Turks had been cleared out of their trenches at the point of the bayonet. The enemy fell back in the night on to another strong position at Barjisiyeh; in the morning General Melliss attacked again without waiting for reinforcements. The issue hung in the balance all day; at 3 P.M. the fight was almost stationary, the enemy clinging to his trenches with desperate tenacity. Melliss ordered a general advance. "The Norfolks[1] and the 120th Infantry, under a terrific fire, dashed at the enemy's trenches with the bayonet, while the 110th Mahrattas, also under a heavy fire, pressed forward on the right, supported by S Battery and dismounted cavalry fire. Almost simultaneously the 16th Brigade, consisting of the Dorsets, 24th Punjabis, 119th Infantry, and some of the 117th Mahrattas, made a general advance, and about 5 P.M. the enemy's forward trenches fell into our hands, though not before the defenders had been killed almost to a man." In the night the Turks fled across the desert towards Nasiriyeh, pursued and harassed by their Arab allies. Physically, so far as material resources went, the enemy was still unbeaten, and we never understood his panic flight.[2]

[1] Lecture delivered to the United Service Institution of India by Major C. C. R. Murphy, General Staff.

[2] *See* Chapter XI., p. 135.

"The miracle of Shaiba," as I have heard it called, may well have filled Force "D" with a sense of its irresistibility. Great odds were overcome, and for seven months, until our exhausted infantry ran up against the Turkish reinforcements at Ctesiphon, odds were not considered at all.

The defeat and dispersal of the Turks at Shaiba[1] enabled us to deal with the enemy detachments on the Tigris and on the Karun. On April 9th General Sir John Nixon arrived and took over supreme command from General Sir Arthur Barrett, the Expeditionary Force, reinforced by the brigades that made up the 12th Division, now having reached the strength of an army corps.

Towards the end of April the 12th Division and the Cavalry Brigade were concentrating on the Karun River. The force was under the command of General Gorringe. The expedition had a double object. It was punitive, and at the same time a demonstration in connection with General Townshend's advance on the Tigris from Qurna to Amara. The hostile Beni Turuf and other tribes were brought into submission; Khafajiyeh was reduced, the whole of Persian Arabistan was cleared of the enemy; and the Turkish column on this side, though they made no stand, were kept so occupied that they were prevented from joining the main force on the Tigris in time to oppose General Townshend's advance. A description of these operations and of the burning march of the 12th Brigade from Ahwaz to Amara is given in some detail in the chapter dealing with the Karun River and the oilfields (p. 243).

Having disposed of the Turk's right and left wings at Shaiba and the Karun, it remained to break up his centre on the Tigris. Amara was our next objective, and our advance was still urged by considerations of defence.

[1] The action is sometimes referred to as the Battle of Barjisiyeh.

Apart from its commercial and administrative importance, the town covered the approaches to Persian Arabistan, protected it from Turkish intrigue and incursions, and afforded a good base for the control of the tribesmen between the Tigris and the Karun on whose submission the security of the oilfields and the pipe-line largely depended.

The second battle of Qurna (May 31st-June 1st, 1915) was probably the most amphibious action that has ever been fought. Not only the Navy, but the Army, was afloat. The Turks' main position lay at Baharan, just beyond the range of our heavy guns. Their advanced positions were on "One Tree Hill" (left bank), "Norfolk Hill," "One Tower Hill," and "Gun Hill" (right bank). These undulations were islands in a swamp. The whole country was flooded to a depth varying from one to three feet, with occasional ditches in which the water was eight feet deep or more. The Tigris downstream of Norfolk Hill was mined. Our troops advanced on May 31st, poling through the reeds in native *bellums*, a flotilla of 500 or more, each boat with an armoured shield in the centre. We had mountain batteries on rafts, and guns of various calibres on tugs, barges and steamers; H.M.S. *Clio* and *Espiègle* advanced slowly upstream, preceded by the armed launches *Shaitan* and *Sumana* minesweeping, with the troops spread over the flooded banks on the port and starboard beam, while the *Odin* and *Lawrence* and *Miner* joined with the fortress guns in concentrating their fire upon island after island in turn. Under cover of this bombardment the 22nd Punjabis stormed and carried One Tree Hill, and the Oxford and Bucks L.I., wading through water waist-deep, carried the enemy's trenches on Norfolk Hill at the point of the bayonet. Position after position was taken. The defence was completely overwhelmed by the volume of fire that was

brought to bear on it, and the Turks were seen scrambling into their boats and paddling and poling for dear life. The whole of the enemy's advanced position was captured by noon.

There was no aeroplane with the force, as there was no dry place in the flood where a machine could alight. Aerial reconnaissances had to be made from Basra forty miles downstream in one uninterrupted flight. On the morning of June 1st, when our airman dropped a message that the Turks were in full retreat up the Tigris, the Navy had already discovered it and were preparing for the chase. They left Baharan at 1 P.M. on June 1st, and at 1.30 P.M. on June 3rd, in spite of mines, obstructions, and forced anchorage owing to the impossibility of navigation in the dark, the *Comet* was in Amara, some ninety miles upstream. The garrison of the town were taken completely by surprise and were bluffed into surrender by General Townshend and the senior naval officer (Captain Nunn), who had at their back the crew of the *Comet*, twenty-two white men all told, and some lascar stokers. The army was some fifty miles downstream, and did not arrive till next day.

In the capture of Amara (June 3rd) the four light armed launches, the *Comet*, *Shaitan*, *Sumana* and *Lewis Pelly*, were the vanguard of the fleet. On June 1st and on the morning of June 2nd they had been co-operating with the deeper-draught vessels. It was impossible, of course, for the sloops to penetrate far into the narrows. Some eight miles above Ezra's Tomb was their limit of navigation, and it was a remarkable feat to have got them so far. Up to this point the Navy had acted as one team. A single vessel would be detached at certain points to seize abandoned lighters full of troops, guns and munitions, or to round up detachments on the bank, or to collect material left behind by the Turks, while the three ocean-going sloops played havoc at long range with their

guns. The *Espiègle* put the Turkish gunboat *Marmaris* out of action; the *Shaitan* sank the *Bulbul*. Four river steamers were taken and eleven barges, and as a result of the action at Qurna and the pursuit our captures included seventeen guns, 1,773 prisoners, apart from rifles, artillery and small-arm ammunition, and stores.

Our next objective was Nasiriyeh, on the Euphrates. The official reasons for this new advance will be found in General Nixon's dispatch (January 1st, 1916). It is pointed out that the importance of Nasiriyeh lies in the fact that it is the base from which a hostile force threatening Basra must start; that it is the centre from which influence can be exercised among the powerful Arab tribes which lie along the Euphrates; that, standing at one end of the Shatt-el-Hai, it closes communications between the Tigris and the Euphrates; and lastly, that it was the headquarters of the civil administration of a large part of the Basra wilayat.

The Nasiriyeh force, with General Gorringe in command, had concentrated at Qurna on January 26th. Fighting, of the amphibious nature which had become normal, began on July 5th, the 30th Brigade attacking. After a stubborn resistance the enemy were dislodged, and on July 6th Suq-esh-Sheyukh was occupied by our gunboats. The Turks then took up a series of positions astride the river some five miles below Nasiriyeh, with both flanks resting on marshes. On the night of the 14th-15th we advanced our position to within 400 yards of the Turkish trenches. The decisive action was fought at dawn on July 24th, the 12th Brigade operating on the left bank, the 30th on the right. The enemy's main position was captured by noon after some heavy hand-to-hand fighting with the bayonet. A second strong position was carried two miles farther on, but by this time the enemy's resistance had been broken; 500 dead were found in the trenches, over 1,100 prisoners were

taken, and they lost all their guns. The next morning the Union Jack was hoisted on Nasiriyeh barracks. In these amphibious operations from April until the end of July our troops fought in a shade temperature which often rose to 113 degrees Fahrenheit and in an atmosphere of the heaviest and densest humidity.

The strategic and political reasons quoted for the advance from Amara were not so convincing as those put forward for the occupation of Nasiriyeh. The Turks, it is true, were concentrating in force at Kut, 143 miles upstream of our advanced position on the Tigris. But the defenders of an invaded country will always be concentrating in strength somewhere in advance of the invading army. In penetrating an enemy's country the difficult point is to know where to stop; the common temptation is to occupy new ground beyond the point where one can concentrate and maintain one's striking force. Kut, it was urged, is a better strategic centre than Amara, since it lies at the junction of the Shatt-el-Hai with the Tigris; and if we held it and Nasiriyeh we should control both ends of the waterway connecting the Tigris and Euphrates. The strategic value of this uncertain channel has probably been exaggerated; it can hardly have compensated for the drawing out by another 150 miles of our already weak and inadequately supplied line of communications. If we had designs on Baghdad, Kut, of course, was the next inevitable step, and preparations on an altogether different scale should have been put in hand; if only on the delta, we had penetrated far enough when we occupied Amara. The triangle we held of Amara-Ahwaz-Nasiriyeh entailed long and difficult communications, and our commitments in Mesopotamia were growing out of all proportion to our resources.

It was decided, however, to disperse Nur-ud-Din's army at Kut-el-Amara and to occupy the town. The

Turks had prepared the most formidable position we had yet faced, astride the river seven miles downstream from Kut, with a bridge, a division on each bank, and their reserves on the left bank. General Townshend, commanding the 6th Division, got in touch with the enemy on September 26th. His tactics were to roll up the Turkish left with his main force after leading the enemy to expect the attack on their right. On September 27th the feint was delivered on the right bank; a bridge was constructed; the crossing from the right to the left bank and the deployment of the infantry opposite the enemy's left flank were silently accomplished in the night, and the Turk was completely outmanœuvred. The plan of action for the 28th was for the 16th and 17th Brigades (General Delamain) to advance in two columns against the enemy's left, one column being directed frontally against the flank entrenchments, while the other marched wide round the flank and attacked in the rear. The 16th Brigade (General Fry) in the meanwhile was to make a holding attack with his left on the river. Delamain's right was protected by the cavalry.

By 2 P.M. the 16th and 17th Brigades had captured the whole of the northern part of the enemy's position. The Dorsets, the 117th Mahrattas, and the 22nd Company of sappers and miners were first in the enemy's trenches with the bayonet. General Delamain's next objective was to fall on the rear of the Turkish force which was being attacked in the front by the 18th Brigade. But before this movement could develop, strong enemy reserves were seen advancing from the south-west in the direction of the bridge. General Delamain quickly changed his objective and flung his brigade on these. The rare occasion of a bayonet charge in the open inspired his troops, exhausted as they were by the heat and thirst and the long marching and fighting without sleep. They hurled themselves on the Turks and precipitated their

rout. This decided the action. By nightfall the enemy were beaten; they evacuated their remaining trenches in the dark; and they left behind them fourteen guns, 1,153 prisoners, and nearly a thousand dead.

Whether the proof be generalship, or the gallantry and endurance and irresistible *élan* of the troops, the battle of Kut-el-Amara will be remembered as one of the most brilliant actions, possibly the most brilliant, fought by the Indian Army. Townshend had became a "Malbrouck." His name was a talisman with the Arabs all over Mesopotamia; even the Turks began to think him irresistible; and the confidence he inspired in his own men knew no measure. He had helped them to achieve impossibilities. The 6th Division had never been beaten; they had never attacked a position which they had not taken. But a greater proof was in store for them. It was Townshend himself, I think, who said that the finest thing his troops had achieved was the retreat from Ctesiphon. But he spoke before the siege of Kut; and it is in reverse even more than in victory that the soul of an army declares itself.

By October 5th the momentum of our offensive and the consequent pursuit had carried us on to Aziziyeh, though, owing to the flats and shoals that held up our fleet, the Turks had the legs of us and suffered no further losses in the retreat. By the time our ships reached Aziziyeh they were already holding a strong defensive position at Ctesiphon, astride the Tigris, eighteen miles south-east of Baghdad, barring the road to the city. The challenge was irresistible. One more victory like Kut-el-Amara, and we were within a day's ride, within a long day's march, of the capital. The Turks were superior in number to ourselves—13,000 regular troops, besides auxiliaries, and thirty-eight guns; they were strongly entrenched behind barbed wire entanglements; also, General Nixon heard, reinforcements were on the road.

To his game little force this only meant that Nur-ud-Din's army must be attacked and defeated before the new troops arrived on the field.

On October 3rd General Nixon cabled to the Secretary of State: "I consider I am strong enough to open the road to Baghdad, and with this intention I propose to concentrate at Aziziyeh." On October 8th the Secretary of State asked General Nixon: "To both occupy and hold Baghdad, what addition to your present forces are you confident will be necessary?" General Nixon replied: "No additions are necessary to my present force to beat Nur-ud-Din and occupy Baghdad; of this I am confident;" but he added that he would require an additional division and one cavalry regiment to enable him to permanently occupy Baghdad. Nixon was instructed to maintain his present position and to be prepared to advance if the reinforcements asked for could be sent to him. Lord Hardinge cabled: "I am glad of the Cabinet's decision. After consultation with Sir Beauchamp Duff, I am of the opinion that Sir John Nixon is in the best position to judge as to the number of troops that will be required. . . . We are prepared to accept his opinion. . . . We may add that the reinforcing troops should reach Baghdad not later than one month after the capture of that city, and this is the period which we calculate must elapse before the Turks could concentrate in strength to attempt its recapture."

The Report makes it clear that at the outset the Indian Government were reluctant to send troops to Mesopotamia; but, the Expedition once afoot, it was India that urged each new advance, and Whitehall that applied the brake, though, after Shaiba, with insufficient firmness. Up to Qurna the Government's aims were specific and definite. Beyond it the men on the spot were given too free a rein. Whitehall relaxed its grip. The successive advances to Amara, Nasiriyeh, Kut-el-

Amara, and finally the adventurous thrust at Baghdad, were all urged by Nixon, supported by India, and conceded by Whitehall. The India Office always consented with reservations. They were opposed to an advance beyond Qurna. They deprecated movements which might involve demands for reinforcements or further penetration. Yet we have seen how the Nasiriyeh advance grew out of the occupation of Amara, and how Kut-el-Amara succeeded Nasiriyeh. Whitehall had the clearest view of the danger these commitments involved. Their responsibility is none the less grave because they allowed their hands to be forced. In the final catastrophe General Nixon is again the main inspiration. The Viceroy, a complacent accessory, should have been restrained by the Commander-in-Chief. Clearly the military advisers responsible for the advance are the most blameworthy. When soldiers decide that military projects are feasible it is not for civilians to veto them. A civilian veto on military grounds must mean a paralysis of the war machine. And the feasibility of the advance to Baghdad had to be considered on purely military grounds; its political advantage was generally conceded. It was not a question of "Ought we to get there?" it was a question of "Can we get there?" And it was not for the Viceroy or Cabinet to say that our military resources were insufficient when the military advisers of the Viceroy and the Cabinet judged them sufficient.

When the decision for the advance to Baghdad was referred by India to Whitehall, Sir Edmund Barrow,[1] the Military Secretary of the India Office, who had urged a cautious policy all along, thought that we might be able to take Baghdad, but that forces weakened by further losses would be insufficient both to hold it securely against counter-attacks and to maintain communication. An

[1] A careful reading of the Mesopotamia Commission's Report will show that the attack in the Press upon Sir Edmund Barrow as the orginator of the advance was unfounded.

inter-departmental committee was appointed by the Prime Minister to consider the question of the advance. It was decided that, "on both political and military grounds, the occupation of Baghdad was most desirable if the necessary reinforcements could be assured. Failing these, General Nixon was not to attempt it." The reinforcements, as we know, were too late. The advance was sanctioned, but the conditions governing the advance were not fulfilled.

On November 17th, four days before the fall of Ctesiphon, General Nixon heard from the War Office that von der Goltz had left Baghdad on November 10th, and that 30,000 Turks were marching from Anatolia to Iraq. He replied that for more than a fortnight his own agents had been giving him similar news, but that he had not accepted these reports as conclusive. General Nixon's countrymen, though they paid so dearly for his blunder, should not be indifferent to the splendid fighting spirit of the man; but "the blind eye" and the deaf ear, applauded in victory, are damned in defeat.

On November 19th, after six weeks' preparations, the advance was resumed. On November 21st the whole force concentrated at Lajj, on the left bank. The next morning, after a night march, an attack was driven in on the enemy's centre and north-east flank. Our dispositions were so arranged as to bring the whole of our striking power to bear on one point. Not only was all our force on the left bank of the river, but only the left half of the enemy's position on that bank was to be vigorously attacked in the first place. Our plan was to roll up the Turks' left flank, and to cut off their retreat upstream in the neighbourhood of the Diala River. This would leave the enemy only the one bridge of boats by which to escape, and it was hoped that artillery or aeroplanes might demolish it.

The battle of Ctesiphon began as other battles fought by the 6th Division. A severe fight lasted through the

day. We captured the enemy's forward trenches and some 1,300 prisoners, then fell upon his second line, captured eight guns, and occupied the position. The troops we had fought were beaten; the Turkish 45th Division was practically annihilated; but we had no reinforcements to oppose the fresh troops that were brought up. The captured trenches changed hands several times, and in the end our line was too thinned to hold the extended position we had won. On the 23rd we were unable to renew the offensive. That night and on the early morning of the 24th we were repelling counter-attacks. On the 24th and 25th our wounded were removed with difficulty to Lajj. On the 25th the Turks received fresh reinforcements. "During the afternoon large columns were seen advancing down the left bank, and also inland as if to turn our right flank, while hostile cavalry threatened our rear. General Townshend was nine miles from his shipping and source of supplies at Lajj, faced by superior forces of fresh troops."[1] There was no alternative but retreat, and the force fell back on Kut-el-Amara.

During the retirement the steadiness of the troops was beyond praise. Their discipline and endurance was remarkable, and the orderliness of the retreat may be gathered from the small number of our casualties, which did not exceed 400.[2] At Umm-el-Tubal, at daylight on the morning of December 1st, we were nearly surrounded by the whole of Nur-ud-Din's army. They had come up in the night, and though they attacked us and were driven off they evidently did not realise that they were in touch with our main force. A mixed brigade under General Melliss had been dispatched towards Kut by a forced march to deal with an Arab force which had cut in on our river communications and held up the Army Commander

[1] General Nixon's Dispatch.

[2] The total casualties at Ctesiphon and in the retirement amounted to nearly a third of the force—690 killed, 3,800 wounded.

and our wounded. This column was recalled by messengers in the night and took part in the fighting in the morning. Daylight revealed the most extraordinary scene: the tents of the Turks were spread out to the north and west almost encircling our camp on three sides. The enemy attacked in massed formation, giving our artillery and the guns of our fleet a splendid target. The *Firefly* and the *Comet* poured in lyddite, as fast as their guns could be loaded, at 2,500 yards. But the Turks were attacking in overwhelming numbers and were well round on our flank. It was only the coolness of the command and the steadiness of the troops which saved us from being enveloped and cut off. Under cover of a counter-attack by the cavalry Townshend extricated his force, retiring by echelon of brigades. Melliss's Brigade had marched eighty miles in three days, and fought on the morning of the first with a magnificent spirit.

All through the retreat the Navy were shepherding the river craft, under fire the whole time from the Turkish guns and snipers on the bank. They worked day and night salving the cargo of stranded barges, towing steamers off the sandbanks when they ran aground, engaging the Turkish batteries, and generally acting as a rearguard to the shipping in retreat. On November 28th the *Shaitan* grounded and sank; the *Firefly* and *Shushan* salved her guns under heavy fire from both banks. In the Umm-el-Tubal action the enemy brought their guns up to close range, and the Turkish infantry came up to within fifty yards of the *Comet*. The *Comet* and *Firefly* were lost. The *Comet* was destroyed by fire; the *Firefly*, after fifteen months as a Turkish gunboat, was recaptured by us in the advance on Baghdad (February 26th, 1917), not far from the bend in the river where she was lost. The breach-blocks of the guns of both ships were removed, the engines disabled, and the crews transferred to the

Sumana. This gallant ship got away without vital hurt, though pock-marked by rifle fire all over. Under shot and shell, the bullets whizzing through her protective plating, her draught increased to danger-point by overloading, she strained through the shallows miles behind the rearguard of the Army. And she had more salvage work to do before she got in. She towed off the mud and brought into Kut a lighter which contained nearly the whole of the small-arm and artillery ammunition for the division. The *Sumana* was left at Kut with Townshend's force to act as a ferry. She fell into the hands of the Turks, and was recaptured by us in the great drive after Nahr Kellak on February 26th, 1917.

The advance guard of the Army reached Kut-el-Amara on December 2nd, thoroughly exhausted. They had marched 49 miles since the morning of the 1st. The next day the garrison began to dig themselves in. They were tired, but confident. The tables were turned now. The Turks would have to take the offensive and attack over the flat. And it would not be for long, as reinforcements were on the way. It never occurred to them that they were faced by a different kind of Turk, and that a division was on the road which had seen our offensive broken up in Gallipoli.

As the Kut garrison dug their line across the loop the two Indian Divisions were embarking at Marseilles, equally confident and in good spirits, thanking their stars to be quit of the deadly monotonous and depressing phase of war with which they had been familiar for over a year. They were leaving siege warfare behind, they thought, and dwelt on encounter battles in the open. These things were to be in the fullness of time, but before their occurrence the divisions had to pass through a cycle of death and rebirth. A roll-call at Baghdad would have been melancholy hearing. Very few of the troops who embarked at Marseilles could call "Adsum" at Samarrah.

CHAPTER III

FROM MARSEILLES TO ALI GHARBI

WE left Marseilles on December 5th, 1915, in the *Royal George*—the Black Watch, the 61st Howitzer Battery, and some odd drafts of different regiments. There were officers on board with detachments who did not know where they were going. "Eastward bound" might mean Salonika, Gallipoli, Egypt, East Africa, or Mesopotamia. We still expected a big Turkish thrust on the Canal. The Serbian reinforcements, we knew, were too late; we thought of them as part of the sacrifice to national honour, and pictured a last stand in the frozen Balkans. Gallipoli, we believed, was another forlorn hope, demanding sacrifice in even more mournful and uninspiring circumstances, for it seemed that our politicians had not the courage to withdraw. There had been a disquieting rumour in France that the Indian Contingent were to be wasted on East Africa. One never seriously believed it, yet orders for Iraq came as a relief. We had just heard of the set-back at Ctesiphon. War in an open country, fighting in the old style, had much to recommend it to men who were becoming cynically reconciled to spending the rest of their lives under shell-fire in a ditch.

The Indians were in high spirits. The King's message had heartened them. Their *izzat* was high. They had stood in the breach and helped to hold the gate against the Hun. They were going East again after a brief taste of a second winter in the West sufficient to remind them of the conditions they were leaving behind. Other hard-

ships of a more familiar kind would be endured in a country that had many of the sights and smells of their own land, and under a compensating sun. A Punjabi Mussulman put the case for Mesopotamia very succinctly: "In France," he said, "if one fights on the ground one is killed. The Sahibs fight in the air and underground, and I have heard that it is the same at sea, where they fight in the air and under the water; but in Iraq, I am told, war is carried on according to the old methods."

Our transport at Marseilles lay beside another which was embarking a Gurkha regiment, and the Gurkhas and the Black Watch sat on the bulwarks of the two ships fraternising in their quiet, undemonstrative way. The "Gurk" acquires an almost island phlegm in these interchanges of courtesies. A Highlander brought out picture postcards and handed them round among the "Gurks," and I saw a havildar give the Highlander cigarettes, emptying his case. He disappeared, returned with it filled, and emptied it again. Souvenirs were exchanged.

At Alexandria we heard that we were to go on. We were all prepared to tranship. The original plan had been that the Lahore and Meerut Divisions were to reorganise in Egypt. But Townshend's investment at Kut had altered the whole situation. Reinforcements were to be pushed through without delay, though we knew nothing about this. We were happily ignorant, too, of the loss and suffering which this change in the order of our sailing would involve. We did not know that we were leaving our transport and ambulances behind.

It was good news that we were going straight on. The captain left the bridge and lunched for the first time in the saloon; he was to enjoy a few weeks out of the danger zone. All our Marconi news had been of the activity of submarines in the Mediterranean. At night the ship was

in darkness save for a few flickering and unsavoury dips. We had passed through dangerous waters, encountered drifting boats and wreckage, doubled about and followed a strange and intricate course.

We left Port Said without regrets. "Is there anything that can strafe us in the Canal?" a junior subaltern asked with intent to be humorous. Everybody smiled. Nevertheless the bridge was sand-bagged, for the Turkish outposts lay a few miles beyond the sky-line, and our troops prayed that Allah might make them bold. At the beginning of the war a night-prowling Arab plumped a mine into the Canal; it floated into the Salt Lake and blew up a small transport. As we passed through the Canal the camps of our own troops and the greetings of the Australians lent the only topical interest to this somewhat hackneyed passage.

The Highlander is perhaps the least demonstrative man in the British Army, and the Black Watch the least demonstrative regiment of Highlanders. When the Australians on the banks of the Canal cheered us as we passed there was not a man among them who would, or could, break the decent matter-of-fact silence that reigned on the ship. The sailors of a French cruiser at Suez lined their bulwarks and gave us three British cheers. The long pause afterwards left one with a disagreeable feeling in the pit of the stomach, until an officer, emerging from the companion, gathered a knot of men together, and, just as our stern was passing clear of their bows, the compliment was acknowledged.

One saw transports leaving crowded quays every day with never a sound or the wave of a hand. We are not a flag-wagging race.

As we threaded the Canal every Australian greeted us with a "Who are you?"

"The Black Watch."

"Where do you come from?"

"France."

"Where are you going?"

No answer.

"Where are you going?"

"Don't know."

After many repetitions a wag called out "Home," another "Tipperary"; but nobody gave it away to the rapscallion Arabs on the bank.

The Black Watch would rather have no decorations in the regiment than have a man receiving purses on civil platforms at home and unburdening his philosophy to the mob under the ægis of the Mayor. A V.C. corporal of the regiment got out at a wayside station in his native country in the dusk and was pursued by two lassies, from whom he ran, but, being tired and burdened by his pack, he was overtaken. Not by the original hussies, he swears, but by the third or fourth relays. So only they wore him down. The whole countryside, he learnt, was coming to church to inspect him in the morning. Afterwards there was to be a kind of ovation. He stayed at home.

At Aden a transport of Indian details gave us a cheer as they left the harbour. Their "Hip, hip, hooray!" was the most lugubrious thing in the world, with no gladness in it, but only the melancholy fatalism of which all Indian music and song is the expression—a pathetic ululation dying off in a kind of long-drawn wail. Their battle-cry is another thing. The "Wah Guru ji ka khalsa! Wah Guru-ji ki fatch!" of the Sikhs, or the "Allah ka nam, Allah ka nam sach hai!" of the Mussulmans, is inspiring when there is business afoot, and has a genuine ring in it as a mere wayside salutation. On Christmas night the pipers came into the mess. They had piped the regiment across many a hot place in France, and escorted bombing parties down many a German trench. In one action four out

of the eight were hit and two killed. They touch a chord deep down somewhere which no doubt has a proper scientific name. The eye of the piper, which conceals his gladness, denying all rapture, is a key to the undemonstrative temper of the men, who would rather die than throw up their bonnets and shout. A subaltern of nineteen years, and no Scot, put the case for the pipes to me in his eloquent slang. "Of course I get cold feet sometimes, like everyone else," he said; "but the pipes soon warm one. Macfarlane, the company piper, piped us across on the 25th—the regimental slogan, you know. By Jove, it was top hole!"

The troops were enjoying this break after fourteen months in the trenches. They had their parades, of course, and physical drill, and all the accustomed stiffening of barrack discipline, which took up a good half of the day. And for relaxation they boxed. Endless competitions. A ring on the bridge-deck aft by moonlight under the electric clusters; a kind of amphitheatre all round, khaki-clad figures obscuring the poop and the promenade deck above, perched on the masts, ratlines, boats, decks, thick as some roll-call of migratory birds, and looking down in a disciplined silence, while two, stripped to the waist, pommel each other till their faces are pulp. An unhandy lad takes three knock-out blows plumb on the jaw and ear and stands up to his man for three rounds without ever getting one of his own back. Another's breathing is choked by his own blood. There is as much blood spilt in a day as in a small battle.

It is an odd way of enjoying an interlude of peace. But strife is latent in the primitive deeps of us all, a fact which was only brought home to us once a week when the padre invoked upon our heads "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." There was an underlying irony in that benediction to the thinking man.

Seeing these men paired and penned and slipping

about, in their own gore, one realises the hardness, tenacity and good nature of the breed. One discovers the smouldering fires which emit no surface spark, coke fires mostly, banked up and inexhaustible. None of your superficial flares like the Arabs' straw-fire *élan*, which splutters and quickly burns itself out.

It was a full month from base to base, but there was no slackening of fibre on the road. The process of the assimilation of the new drafts went on. Since the Black Watch sailed from India at the beginning of the war they had had 1,500 killed and wounded. Two officers remained of the original battalion—both had been wounded—and less than two hundred men, salt enough to leaven the new drafts. The men filled out their jackets, and their kilts gave them a look of dogged, bow-kneed strength which neither trousers, breeches, nor trews can achieve. The red hackle in their caps was weather-worn, faded claret colour with a year of Flanders. It and the red flash of the garter lent them an air of modest workmanlike swank.

The Turks, too, are a dogged breed, and one could not help remembering that they had an army, on paper at least, of 700,000 men, and but few preoccupations in Europe. If they could not drive a wedge in between us and the Russians and save their city of the Caliphs, tradition had exaggerated their military virtues.

It was all a question of transport with us as with them. Of course, if we had thought of having a railway early in the war we might have carried it on behind us with each step of the advance, until our communications were strong enough for the stroke at Baghdad. As it was, we had the remnants of a division at Kut, and two more on the point of landing. We might with luck be able to put 20,000 rifles into the firing line and feed them. No very great means for such great ends. But then, the birth, or death, of the mouse is followed,

not preceded, in our history, by the labouring of the mountains. It was our British way to hope that it would be all right. If anyone could do it it would be these stout fellows on the *Royal George*.

Outside the bar of the Shatt-el-Arab we left our 15,000-ton liner and boarded a more modest vessel, which landed us in Basra on the morning of December 31st. It was not until we reached the base that we heard that Townshend and his garrison were invested at Kut. There was a disquieting rumour that his supplies and ammunition were running short, and this filled us with a feverish anxiety lest we should be too late for the push. The same night we transhipped to two paddle-steamers with lighters attached. These were to take us upstream to Ali Gharbi, the point where the force were concentrating for the advance.

We had entered the oldest country in the world. Qurna, where we anchored in the morning, is the reputed site of the Garden of Eden; for evidence we were shown the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Here the old channel of the Euphrates joins the Tigris. The date groves, which stretch for some four miles upstream, are the last outpost of fertility. After this one enters a treeless waste of swamp and desert; but one is seldom out of sight of herds of donkeys and cattle and flocks of sheep. The dwellers in the reed and mud huts run alongside the boat clamouring for baksheesh and scrambling for coppers thrown them by the troops.

Upstream the Biblical tradition holds. The second night we moored by Ezra's Tomb, a domed shrine silhouetted among the palms in the clear starlight. One could not help moralising upon the new lap we were pursuing in the continuity of history when one heard a lowlander of Perth point out the scribe's resting-place to his mate as "yon corner-hoos." Navigation above

Ezra's Tomb, until one reaches Amara, where the stream widens, becomes slow and difficult. One passes the Narrows and the Devil's Elbow, and the river makes sudden twists and turns. The physical features of the country are familiar to our Indian troops. The villages resemble those of the Punjab or the North-West Frontier. Qalat Salih might be a quarter of Dera Ismail Khan; the same sloping mud walls enclosing the *haveli*, or courtyard, with the cow-dung cakes for fuel plastered against them to dry in the sun, and scooped wooden drain-pipes projecting from the roof; for vegetation, the date palm, with an occasional mulberry or willow, fed by irrigation channels. A few of the houses are of sun-dried brick, but, as in the more desert parts of the Punjab, there is an entire absence of ornamentation, save in the two-storeyed, balconied buildings of the merchants and officials on the river front, where the woodwork is latticed and fretted.

Some of the riverain Arabs are handsome, and have a certain hawklike dignity and grace of carriage. For headgear they wear the *kefieh* and *aagal*. The *kefieh*, a chequered cotton cloth, generally, in the case of Shiahs, of a blue and white pattern, is kept in its place by the *aagal*, a double plait of goat's hair or wool. In the cold months the *kefieh* is let down under the chin, covering the ears. In the hot weather it is drawn up and tied round the crown of the head. Many of the children have brown or chestnut hair. The women are fair and go about unveiled. I was talking to an Afridi in a Punjabi regiment, and asked him if this was not unusual in a Mussulman people. He explained with an eloquently moderated scorn that they were not true Mohammedans, but only Shiahs.

The Indian sepoy regards both the country and its inhabitants in equal contempt. "It passeth my under-

standing," the Afridi added, "why the Sirkar should desire this Satanlike land." I agreed with him that, judged by merely physical considerations, the country was not worth the ammunition spent on it, though a wise Sirkar might find the means of rendering it fertile. There were examples of worse soil in the Punjab that had been made not merely fruitful, but equal to the best. This he admitted. "The people are not cultivators," he explained; "they are merely *bunniahs.*"

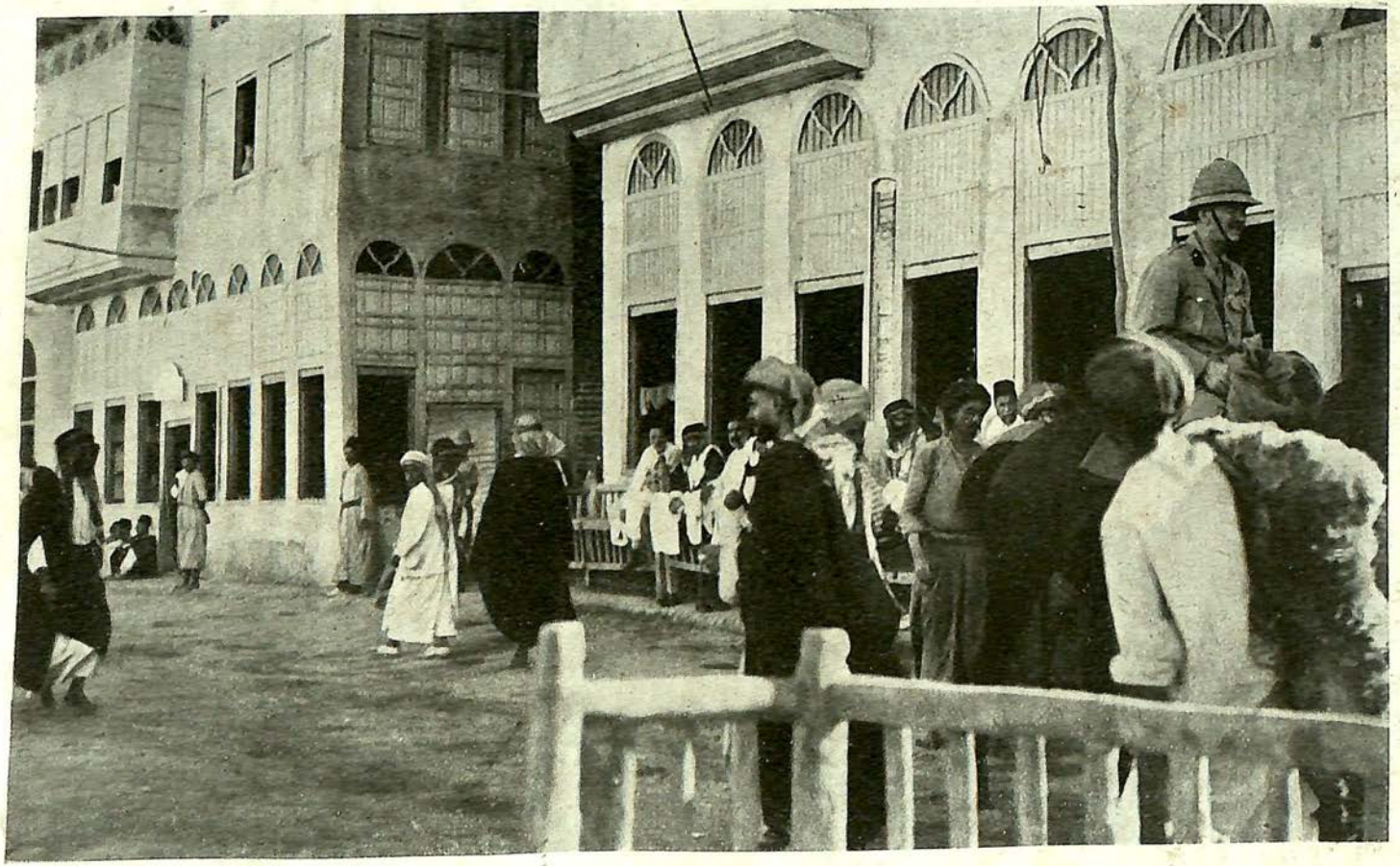
"Do you know anything of their language?" I asked. He smiled. "I know enough to tell them to fetch water and to clear out," he said. "That is sufficient for such a people." And he laughed a laugh which implicitly embraced the Sahib's contempt with his own. He was certainly a masterly and imposing figure, and his six-foot three and breadth in proportion, and his spotless accoutrements, were well set off by the rabble on the bank.

As for the climate, he declared the Punjab a health resort compared to Mesopotamia. But that is always the sepoy's way, more even so than the Sahib's. He will disparage the place where he is stationed, preferring his own sterile plot of earth, even if it be a firepit like Multan.

Amara, 31 miles upstream from Qalat-Salih, is the most considerable town between Basra and Baghdad. It is now teeming with tribesmen and all the flotsam and jetsam which follow in the wake of the war. The British flag flies over the Turkish barracks, and all along the river front are signboards in English—"General Stores," "Advanced Ordnance Depot," "Engineer's Park," "Hospital," etc., and the wounded British "Tommy," seated on his bench in his blue hospital suit, surveys the Tigris with the same complacency as he has watched the waters of the Nile, the Seine, or the Thames.

The bazaar is spacious and stone-roofed, some 35 feet in height, as in Baghdad, and the crafts are localised, as in all the cities of the East. At every turning from the main thoroughfare the street names are inscribed in English beside the Arabic characters. There is opportunity here for an imaginative touch; but one finds a nomenclature which is truly British. The Sook-el-Gazareen of the Arabs has become plain "Butcher's-street"; the Sook-el-Khabureen, Baker's-street. Sapper-street, Pontoon-street, Soap-street, proclaim the needs of the hour as if the scribe of Haroun al-Raschid had never existed.

Every fifty yards or so there is an Arab café, where the denizens of the bazaar, hooded in their *kefiehs*, squat on high-backed wooden benches like pews in a village church, pass round the *kaliun* (Persian *huqa*), and exchange guttural comments on the business of the hour. Some play dominoes. Others sit and gaze into vacancy. These dark taverns are crowded as teashops in Piccadilly after a *matinée*. But there is more diversity of type. For Amara is a thoroughfare. It is here that the caravan route from Dizful, in Persia, meets the Tigris, and the town is the headquarters of the Sabæans. If one were not in uniform the café would be a good point of vantage from which to watch the crowd outside. A group of Kurds passes in the street in their high bulbous hats of rough felt, their smooth locks hanging free and clipped about their ears after the fashion of the Mahsuds or the Powindahs of Afghanistan. Two of these rough mountaineers meet and embrace and salute each other with alternative kisses on each cheek. A Jew, his Turkish fez bound round with a *kefieh*, is proclaiming to an Arab policeman, now a servant of the British Raj, that he has been robbed of a piece of silver. He repeats his tale with solemn gestures, which might be an accompaniment to a recital of the Book of Jeremiah. A pale, scholarly-



THE BAZAAR, AMARA.

looking Persian from Dizful is appraising a skein of wool at the opposite stall. A wild-eyed Bakhtiari glances nervously into the café and hurries on. And threading this

"New-caught, sullen people,
Half devil and half child,"

there passes the proud, upright, well-groomed figure of the Indian sepoy, and the young British subaltern upon whom authority sits lightly, and whose competence to handle the tribes of the desert or the mountain is palpable at a glance, back view or front, down the whole length of the street.

It is the Turks we are fighting; but it is a significant comment upon the length and strength of the British arm and the complexities of administration upon which we enter with a light heart that there is not a Turk visible among these thousands of newly-made subjects of the King. All this motley of tribes and religions, with their conflicting interests, policies, and creeds, is incidental. Judging by the past, everything will be straightened out all right. In the meanwhile Amara is a mere ripple in the Mesopotamian backwater; ahead of us, 150 miles up the river, is the Turk.

Above Amara the banks become even more barren and desolate. The reed huts of the Arabs give place to black goat-hair tents. From here to Sheikh Saad we are in the heart of the Bani Lam tribe, the most truculent and inhospitable of the riverain Arabs. One has read of their viciousness in old books of travel. Layard was warned not to enter their country by the friendly tribesmen of Hawizeh, who described the Bani Lam as "not Arabs but Kafirs," men who neither respected the laws of hospitality nor behaved in any sort as good Mussulmans, who were as treacherous as they were savage and cruel, and who would cut the throat of a guest for a trifle. They were now ostensibly on our

side and against the Turk. The cardinal rule in such cases was put to me very tersely by the General commanding the forces. "You may take it," he said, "that upstream the Arab is hostile, downstream friendly." A simple geographical definition with a moral in it at the same time.

The country of the Bani Lam is as inhospitable as the stock it breeds. The scenery is easy to describe, hard caked mud on either bank. During the cold season two plants only thrive in this waste. One is the *kharnoog*, a dreary prickly shrub, called, for want of a better name, "camel thorn," though it is not the camel thorn of the North-West Frontier. The other is the *agoon*, a fast-rooted, stringy plant which boasts a feathery leaf and is used for fuel. Above Amara the palm is a rarity; the few that are seen are dwarfed and meagre and bear no fruit. Between Sheikh Saad and Kut-el-Amara there is not a single tree.

At Ali Gharbi the river takes a sharp bend to the east, and here a new feature lends variety to the scenery in the Pusht-i-Kuh hills, a low-lying snow-rimmed range on the Persian frontier, about which clouds hang all day and throw dark shadows on a mauve ground. The river approaches to within thirty miles of these mountains, though in the clear desert air the distance seems less. The ground between the river and the hills is maliciously and fanatically sterile. Even the *kharnoog* and the *agoon* come to an end. It is the country over which Childe Roland rode to the Dark Tower, naked earth in its most repulsive form, cracked and caked and rutty, without the rock, gravel, or sand which lend colour to the desert. It was over this rutty ground that the transport wagons bumped and jolted with their freight of wounded on the evening of January 7th. The memory of their sufferings is mixed up with one's impressions of the malice of the soil.

But at Ali Sharqi, on the edge of desolation, there is a belt of trees, an unbroken sweep of mulberry and willow embowering a blue-domed Arab shrine. When we first saw them they were in the full glory of gold. We passed this grove with an anticipation of home-sickness; for though the country was but a few days old to most of us, and there was much of interest and excitement in store, we could foresee a time, perhaps a year, perhaps two years distant, when the sight of a real tree, no fibrous palm, but a genuine English tree with sap in it, would stand for the best of what we had left behind. In the desert heat our thoughts would be of trees and running water and the green hawthorn shade. Two days after passing Ali Sharqi the Relieving Force paid their toll. Within a fortnight two-thirds of the column were wounded, sick or dead. Few of those who fell at Sheikh Saad can have suspected that these willows and mulberries were the last trees they would see.

But we were a cheery crowd on board, and pushed on our old paddle-box at full steam. The only thing we feared was that we should not be in time for the advance. We cursed our luck at Amara when we had to lie up and coal. And when we woke in the morning to find we had half a dozen pontoons in tow plunging in our wake we cursed our luck again. For they would hold us back the best part of a day.

CHAPTER IV

SHEIKH SAAD

NOTHING could exceed the muddle at Ali Gharbi. Regiments were thrown into new brigades as they came up the river. There were brigades made up of units which had never been brigaded before, an improvised staff both in the Tigris Corps and the 7th Division, brigadiers who did not know their regimental commanders, and a Corps Commander who did not know his divisional commanders and brigadiers. The year's experience in France had enabled the Indian Corps, by a process of elimination, to put together a very strong staff, which would have been invaluable during the first few months in Mesopotamia. The substitution of a new and improvised staff at the last moment invited disaster.

With the arrival of the Black Watch on January 5th, 1916, the 7th Division was complete save for the important matter of transport, ambulances, a brigade of artillery,[1] and various details of equipment. The Division was fully equipped in France, and the rule is that units should embark with their first line transport. But at Marseilles the only concern was to get the Force out of the country as quickly as possible. If the Division could have been reconstituted in Egypt according to the original plan, everything might have been put in order. But when the troops were at sea news came through of the investment of Kut, and the Force was pushed on in the order in which it embarked. The confusion that arose was part

[1] Before the War an Indian Army Division took the field with one brigade of artillery; in France the establishment was brought up to three.

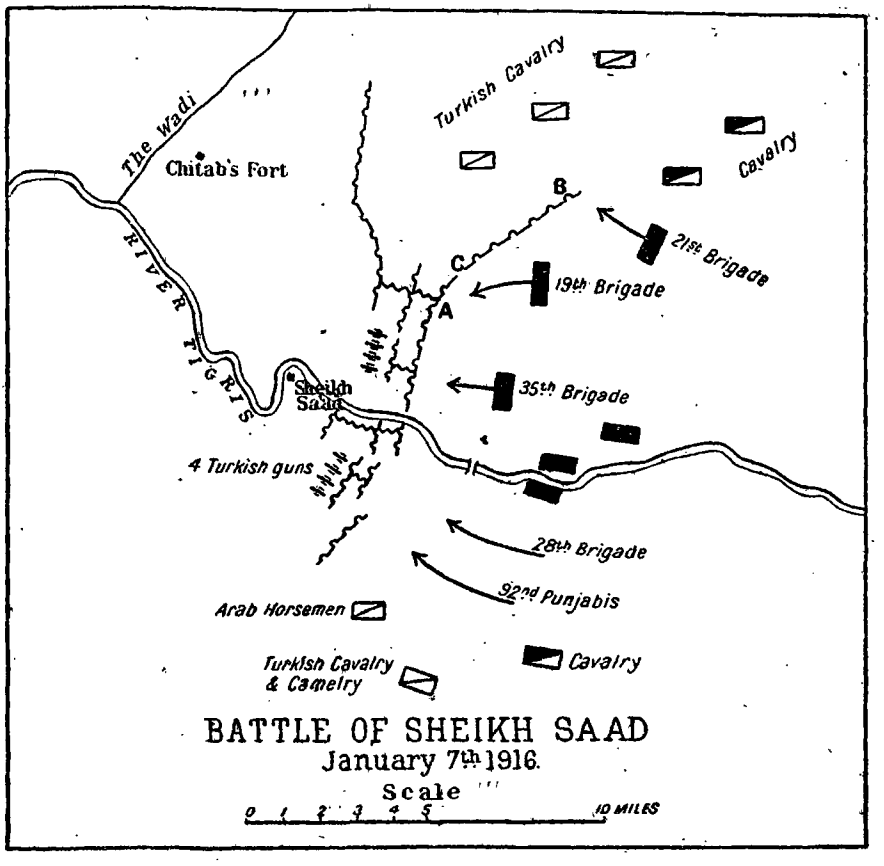
of the harvest of tares that we had sown by our blind precipitancy in Mesopotamia. Regiments embarked ahead of their mules, their transport perhaps in a third ship, batteries with mules and horses following. One brigade of artillery was left behind. Its place was filled by the Sussex Territorial Battery and the 72nd and 78th heavy batteries from India, with old unconverted 15-pounders and other guns of obsolete pattern. Bombs, rifle grenades, range-finders, Vérey lights, periscopic rifles, were left in France. There was a shortage of telephone wire. One brigade signal section did duty for the whole Force. The Divisional Staff arrived on January 7th, during the battle of Sheikh Saad. On January 20th the first field ambulance came up the Tigris without its transport. The river craft in the country was not sufficient to carry the men and ammunition to the front.

Nevertheless, a feeling of optimism prevailed. The resources of the enemy were underestimated. The idea seemed to be that as we were British, and the troops who were investing Townshend and holding the approach to Kut were merely Turks, we had nothing to do but to go straight in and clear them out. This had been the simple process with the 6th Division, who had never been defeated until they were met by overwhelming numbers at Ctesiphon and driven back upon Kut-el-Amara. Our defeat on the Tigris was the repercussion of Gallipoli, which set free the flower of the Turkish army to oppose our advance. While we were vacillating at home, uncertain whether to hold the peninsula or withdraw, the Germans, with clearer vision, were preparing the ground where the new Turco-British struggle must be. Every mile of our advance weakened our resources and strengthened theirs, bringing us nearer to the enemy reinforcements and farther from our own source of transport and supplies. The keen brain of von der Goltz inspired the strategy of the Turk and perfected his

defences. German intelligence supplied the only part of the machine that was wanting; for in a defensive campaign Turkish infantry can hold their own with the best in Europe.

Yet against these formidable preparations our troops were pushed on in detail as they arrived upon the scene, apparently with no other plan than to discover the enemy and to drive him out of his trenches by sheer superiority of moral. No attempt was made to concentrate our forces on any one point of the Turkish position, though our bridge of boats gave us a mobility which the enemy could not command. In extenuation of what might at first sight appear a lack of strategy and prevision it must be borne in mind that the Corps Commander's hands were forced. He was told that Townshend was near the end of his resources, and that Kut must be relieved within eight days. January 15th was quoted as the last day that the garrison could hold out. Such was the information at General Headquarters, and the urgency of the case made it necessary to push on before preparations could be completed. Aylmer had orders to advance on the 5th. The 3rd Division were already on the river and would be at Ali Gharbi in ten days. Ten days would have nearly doubled his striking power. But Townshend, apparently, had not seriously considered the chance of a reverse, or prepared for the necessities of a longer siege. The optimism at Kut exceeded the optimism at Ali Gharbi. It never occurred to the garrison that the Relieving Force would fail to get through. "Townshend himself would have done it," was the conviction of his own division, as well as of the majority of the Tigris corps. Thus an over-confidence, born of his own proved resourcefulness and success in the past, contributed more than anything else to the ultimate doom of his garrison. As it proved, he could have eked out his resources to a much later date had he reduced his scale of rations earlier and ransacked

the town for provisions. His demand for immediate relief cramped General Aylmer's offensive, and forced him to strike before his column was fully organised. How far his failure was due to errors in command, how far it was inevitable owing to enforced rapidity of action combined with the hostility of climatic conditions, is still a



disputed point. The common verdict is, after all allowances have been made, that generalship was to blame. Kut was lost in the actions of January 7th, 13th, and 21st. Afterwards the rain and floods intervened, and removed all human possibility of retrieving our mistakes during the first phase of the advance.

Up to December 27th the Turks had held Sheikh Saad

with mounted troops only, but on the 28th they began to move downstream from their main camp at Shumran, and the movement was continued for several days. When we left Ali Gharbi their position was astride the river some three and a half miles east of Sheikh Saad. Their numbers were estimated at 4,500 on the right, and 9,500 on the left bank. These were reinforced by some 2,000 more, in addition to which was the usual horde of irregular Arabs, horse and foot, on either flank, ready to close in and harass us as occasion offered. Our column on the right bank consisted of the 28th Brigade and the 92nd Punjabis under General Kemball. On the left bank we had the 35th Brigade (General Rice), the 19th Brigade (Colonel Dennys), and the 21st Brigade (General Norie), the whole force on both banks under the command of General Younghusband. The advance of the leading troops began on January 4th, but we were not in touch with the enemy until the morning of the 6th.

We had one advantage over the Turk besides our superiority in guns, and this was the extra mobility that our bridge of boats gave us. For we had a bridge at the time, though it was mostly built of *mashhufs*, country boats of rotten wood and unadaptable design, which were continually collapsing and letting our transport into the Tigris. Fourteen months of war had passed in Mesopotamia and the pontoons which might have saved Kut were not forthcoming. However, the *mashhuf* bridge served our purpose during the first days of our advance, until the swollen stream and contrary winds wrecked it. In the actions at Sheikh Saad and the Wadi it gave us the superior mobility that the enemy needed. We could have concentrated at will on either bank and attacked each wing of the enemy in turn. A strategical advantage which generals spend months in manœuvring for was given to us and thrown away. The Turks' bridge at Shumran was not completed until February 3rd. The Shatt-el-Hai,

which lay between them and their base, was bridged two days later.

Two alternative plans of campaign were open to us when we advanced. First, to leave a holding force on the left bank and to drive our main offensive home on the right bank, where the enemy were weakest, getting in behind them with our cavalry and pinning them inside the bend of the river at Sheikh Saad. After rounding up this force we should have been in a strong position to attack the enemy on the north bank, as the village commanded their trenches across the river, and we could have brought enfilade fire to bear on them simultaneously with a frontal attack.

The other alternative was to make a concentrated attack on both banks at the same time. These were the tactics adopted, and no doubt the necessity for a rapid advance weighed in the decision. Our force was distributed north and south of the river more or less in proportion to the forces opposed to us. Had we been successful in dislodging the enemy on both banks and in pressing the advantage home, it was hoped that the Turks would not make another stand this side of Kut.

On January 6th the columns on both banks came into touch with the enemy. The advance guards of General Kemball's force on the right bank sighted the enemy at 10.30 A.M. The attack of the main body was directed upon what was reported by aeroplane reconnaissance to be the right flank of the enemy's position; but as the attack progressed it became evident that the enemy's flank extended farther to the south, and our attack was drawn off more and more in that direction. At 4 P.M., when the brigade had reached within 300 to 500 yards of the enemy, battle outposts were taken up for the night. On the same day (January 6th) General Rice's brigade had advanced on the north bank and engaged the enemy. His directions were to hold them and not to press the

attack. The brigade's first intimation of the position of the Turk on the left bank was when the advance guard of the 16th Cavalry was led up to within three hundred yards of his trenches by "friendly Arabs." The Arabs escaped into the trenches when fire was opened on the cavalry.

The morning of the 7th was foggy; the atmosphere was close to a degree. By noon, in spite of the season, the heat was intense, for up to this date no rain had fallen. The mist gave General Kemball a splendid opportunity to throw in his brigade with the least possible loss. Nothing could have been forfeited by crumpling up the Turk on one bank before the other. But the General's hands were tied. Orders admitted no initiative. Operations were suspended for the concerted attack on both banks of the river. This opened on the south bank at about 2.30 P.M., when the 92nd Punjabis, who had been called up to a flank attack on the left, had come up level. From this moment the attack was pushed home vigorously, and at four o'clock the brigade was in the enemy's trenches. The Leicesters on the left sustained the reputation of dash and fearlessness earned in France. Sixteen officers of the regiment fell in the attack—seven killed and nine wounded, and 298 of the rank and file. The 51st Sikhs on the right of the Leicesters were the first to secure a footing in the enemy's lines, and it fell to them to capture the two mountain guns and three maxims which were opposite their position. The 53rd Sikhs and 56th Rifles on the right advanced with the same resolute *élan*. These three regiments, part of the old Punjab Frontier Force, with the Leicesters, made up the 28th Brigade. They, with the 92nd Punjabis, made the great haul on January 7th. Over 350 Turkish dead were buried the next morning, and, in addition to the guns and maxims, 600 prisoners were taken. But the cost of the victory was heavy. The casualties in the 28th Brigade alone, apart from the 92nd Punjabis, were 1,106.

General Kemball's force in their attack had the support of one battery of field and one of mountain artillery. And they had this advantage over the 21st and 19th Brigades on the other bank, that they were dug in the night before the attack and had with them forward observation officers. Two batteries cannot do much in the way of gun preparation on a line of trenches extending over two miles. Still, the guns made good shooting, and were welcome to the troops opposite the part of the line where their fire was directed.

It must be remembered that in January our infantry had to attack entrenched positions with a very small proportion of normal artillery support. The number and calibre of the guns behind them were inferior to the standard that holds in European warfare, and offered, perhaps, a tenth of the support that they had received under the abnormal conditions in France. Also the business of range-finding and registering, so easy in the stationary conditions on the Western front, was doubly difficult for an advancing column continually operating against new and hidden positions. The Turks are adepts in trench work. They dig deep and narrow; moreover the mirage and the flatness of the ground helped them. The first thing one saw of the enemy's position was the glint of his bayonets. On the left bank our infantry had to attack virgin trenches untouched by shell-fire. The fight on this side of the river was a moving battle, and the attack of the 19th and 21st Brigades was not directed from trenches prepared overnight; it was delivered in the open. Owing to the mirage, our artillery never found the enemy's trenches.

The main Turkish position (A) on the left bank lay at right angles to the river, with an outflanking trench (B) flung out on their left. On the morning of the 7th the 35th Brigade, which had been heavily engaged the day before, was holding the enemy's centre and right, while

the 19th Brigade (the Seaforths and 125th Pioneers, with one company of the 28th Punjabis) were advancing and developing a turning movement round the enemy's left flank (B). At this point the 21st Brigade was called up to fill in the gap (C) left exposed by the divergence of the 19th Brigade on the right. The 2nd Black Watch and 6th Jats advanced to the attack. The 9th Bhopals and 41st Dogras were in support. The Black Watch, who had come straight through from Marseilles to Ali Gharbi, disembarked on the 5th, marched 22 miles on the 6th, and were engaged the next morning. Twice only on the voyage had they had the opportunity for a route march, once at Port Said and once during their short halt at Amara. Their long march in the burning sun after five weeks' inaction was a severe strain even for seasoned troops, but they stood the test well, and advanced at an unusually rapid rate, hardly pausing to fire until they were within 400 yards of the enemy. At 1,200 yards they came under well directed artillery fire. The range of the Turkish guns was very accurate. Simultaneously with their advance General Rice threw in his reserve battalion, the 1/5th Buffs, on the right of his line, which had consisted since overnight of the 37th Dogras, the 97th Infantry, and 102nd Grenadiers, forming a *point d'appui* for the left of the attack of the 19th Brigade. With the advance of the Buffs, the attack of the 35th Brigade was vigorously pressed.

The critical moment was when the 19th Brigade under orders from the Staff turned inside the enemy's outflanking trench (B) instead of going round it. When they moved some two miles to the right, it was noticed that the enemy was hurriedly prolonging his line so as to meet their flank attack. This entailed a much wider detour, and it became impossible to carry through their objective and keep in touch with the 35th Brigade at the same time. In the meanwhile the 21st Brigade, the

Black Watch and 6th Jats (the 9th Bhopals and 41st Dogras being held in support) had come into the gap. The Turks in the flanking trench held back their fire until the Seaforths and 125th Napier's Rifles and 28th Punjabis, together with the Black Watch and 6th Jats on their left, had reached a point where they were exposed to a concentrated frontal and enfilade fire. The Highlanders and Indians made a most gallant attempt to break through the enemy's line; they drove in their attack on the whole line to within 300 yards of the Turkish trenches; many fell within a hundred yards, but the ground was totally devoid of cover and nothing could stand up against the pelting hail of lead. Troops who had been through Loos and Givenchy described it as equal to any rifle fire they had come under on the Western Front. The 35th Brigade on the left encountered the same deadly fire. All three brigades had to dig themselves in.

Possibly if we had made a wider turning movement and got round the outflanking trench instead of passing within it the Turks might have been enfiladed and forced to abandon their position. This is a doubtful point, for behind (B) there was a trench echeloned three miles in rear of the Turkish left which in its turn would have enfiladed our flanking movement, had we made a wider detour. It is here that the advantage of a prepared position comes in against an enemy attacking over unprepared ground. On either bank of the river the Turks had trenches extending for miles on their flanks. These were deep and narrow, and troops could move quickly along them from point to point without exposing themselves. Some were held by Arab irregulars and camelry, others were empty, but connected by communication trenches with reserve posts in the rear. Behind the first line they had prepared trenches in echelon which extended far back and rendered a turning movement almost hopeless. The position was the same on both banks of

the river, and that is why in each case the attack had to be driven home in front.

The Battle of Sheikh Saad offers an historic illustration of the disadvantage a mobile attacking column is put to when operating in an enemy's country. Apart from these Turkish tactics the country offered its defenders two natural advantages against enveloping movements by an invading force proceeding along the river. One was the absence of water inland, the other the presence in many places of impassable swampy ground of brackish water, as at the Suwacha Marsh, extending to within a mile or two of the Tigris.

Before Sheikh Saad France had seemed the deadliest theatre of the war, deadly in its monotony, in its cramped horizon, in the disproportion of sacrifice and reward, in the hopelessness of ever moving on. The Indian contingent had left their trench-bound companions in Flanders without regret. The troops on the transports had looked to Mesopotamia as a release. After fifteen months of siege warfare the prospect of an open field and surface fighting in the good old style with flanking movements and outposts and advanced guards had much to commend it. Here at last in this illimitable plain were trenches which must end somewhere, and it seemed that there would be a term to frontal attacks. Sheikh Saad falsified these hopes. The difficulties of the country were at once apparent—the costliness of an offensive over level tracts under heavy fire, the absence of gun preparation upon the enemy's position. Here there were no protective hedges, villages, or banks, but only flat, caked, illimitable mud. Instead of a quick rush measured by seconds, the distance of a hurdle race, our infantry came under rifle fire at 2,000 yards, and the line was woefully thin before they saw so much as the head of a Turk, and in this moving battle there were no communication trenches to curtail the zone of fire.

Yet Staff officers with the Corps who had been through the early phases of the campaign believed that the 7th Division could have cleared the Turks out of their trenches if they had gone in with the bayonet. They did not realise the quality of the new troops we had against us. Townshend's Division, they argued, had never failed to break through; and it was only this siege warfare on the Western Front that had impregnated the troops from France with the vicious habit of digging themselves in; it was their fatal blunder in letting the campaign resolve itself into trench warfare that threatened to lose us Kut. More than one officer of the "Mesopotamian school" confided to me these views at the time. On the other hand, I heard it stated, to explain present failure as compared with past successes, that the enemy whom the Mesopotamian school had encountered in 1914-15 had been raw levies, "mere Buddoos,[1] in fact." There was injustice in both extremes—greater injustice in the Mesopotamian view, as the failure of all units to break through at Sannaiyat proved.

Modern warfare has proved that it is impossible to advance long distances in the open and take prepared positions under machine-gun fire against disciplined troops, or only possible with vastly superior numbers and at a certain calculated sacrifice which is generally prohibitive. None knew this better than the troops from France, and it is only fair to say that their critics admitted the splendid gallantry of the men; it was the Staff they blamed. However, one incident in the day may be quoted in support of the view that the Turks might have been evicted. When the 19th Brigade made their abrupt left turn, two companies of the Seaforths were detailed for the assault, supported by the other two companies. They had advanced within 700 yards of the enemy when

[1] In speaking of the local Arab I have used the word "Buddoo," the name he was known by in the Force, though the tribesmen in these parts are a very different type from the true Bedou, who made up the army of our Ally the Sherif.

a demonstration on the right diverted three companies of the battalion to meet it, leaving only one company to carry on the attack. This company pressed on with the greatest gallantry, mowed down by direct and enfilade fire, and three officers and thirty men reached a point within forty yards of the Turkish line. There they lay in the open ready for the final rush, when, looking back, they saw they were unsupported. The Turks in their immediate front were jumping up and leaving their trenches. With bombs or any kind of support this gallant remnant would have "gone in," but unaided the attack was hopeless. They lay where they were, still as the dead, till dark.

The Seaforths lost twenty officers—five killed, fifteen wounded—and 380 men. The gallantry of their attack cannot have been surpassed in the annals of the regiment. The wounded went on firing till they were shot a second or third time.

Among the Indian regiments the 6th Jats lost most heavily. They went into action 485 strong and came out 150. Two British and three Indian officers were killed, and five British and ten Indian officers wounded. The battalion was among the first of the Indian regiments to be engaged in France, paying heavy toll at Festubert on November 23rd, 1914, in their magnificent counter-attack across the snow. Since that date they had been proved again and again in the front line of attack, and but few of the original draft had survived.

An heroic instance of the devotion of the Indian was witnessed by the forward batch of Seaforths. An officer of the 28th Punjabis had fallen close to the Turkish trenches, when two sepoys of his regiment were seen to crawl up and build round him a parapet of earth. They saved their Sahib, but at the sacrifice of their own lives.

At about four o'clock our offensive was met by a counter-flanking movement on the part of the enemy. Three

large masses of Arab cavalry and infantry were seen moving across the plain to the north on our right. The two leading bodies of troops appeared to consist entirely of cavalry; and the third consisted of cavalry in front and rear and infantry in between. The objective of the first two seemed to be the second line transport, and possibly the river bank to the east; the third body proceeded to develop an attack against the right wing of the 19th Brigade. The 41st Dogras, and later, in extension of the line, the 9th Bhopals, were sent forward facing north to meet this hostile counter-attack, which developed to within 600 yards, when it became stationary.

This was the position on the left bank at dark. About midnight a distant fire attack was opened by the enemy and continued with little intermission through the night and the next day. But they had begun to evacuate, and on the morning of the 9th were observed to be retiring all along the line. The 41st Dogras pushed forward into the enemy's trenches and captured some sixty prisoners. The position on the south bank was finally abandoned at the same time. At noon on the 9th the column advanced to Sheikh Saad.

Hunger may have been one of the causes of the Turkish retirement. Transport for so considerable a force must have been difficult with their river communications interrupted at Kut. Our prisoners complained that they had had nothing to eat for three days. On the other hand their rearguard had fulfilled its purpose, to hold us back, gain time, and reduce our effectives. We had paid unstintingly for our advance; in the meantime we were seven miles nearer Kut.

CHAPTER V

AFTER SHEIKH SAAD

At Sheikh Saad we lost 4,262 of General Aylmer's column in this frontal attack upon the advanced trenches of the enemy, a force equal to half the garrison we were relieving. A hundred and thirty-three British officers fell in the action. But it is not the long roll of honour that lends bitterness to the thought of that unhappy day; it is the tragic memory of the wounded. Never since the Crimea can there have been such a collection of maimed and untended humanity in a British camp as were gathered on the Tigris bank on the night of January 7th. After fifteen months of the war there was not a hospital ship or barge on the river. Doctors, ambulances, medical equipment, vital to the scene, were following the Force in leisurely transports from France. The five field ambulances of the 7th Division were on the high seas. While our casualties in the battle were over 4,000, there was barely provision for 250 beds.[1]

The resistance the Turks put up was unexpected. We on the *Malamir* had little idea that our force was heavily engaged that day. We had heard the guns overnight, and again in the morning as the steamer forged upstream. From time to time we climbed on to the roof of the captain's cabin and watched the distant shrapnel. The first shell in the morning disturbed a flight of sand grouse,

[1] The hospital accommodation at Sheikh Saad consisted of No. 20 Combined Field Ambulance (110 beds); two sections of No. 3 F.A. (50 beds); four improvised sections collected at Basra and Amara; and on the right bank a cavalry ambulance which was converted into a clearing hospital. No. 20 Field Ambulance alone took in over 1,900 men. All these units were short of personnel.

which came wheeling across the river in such myriads that we who were watching from the bridge forgot the shells and turned our glasses on the birds—a skein of plumage half a mile long tying itself up in loops in the most complicated evolutions, then converging in a hoop. They were dark at one turn, silvery at the next, as the sun caught their underwings through the black smoke of a monitor which they thridded with light.

The evolutions of our troops on land were obscured by the mirage. We saw infantry like trees moving, and thought them a transport train. Other masses which could be nothing but artillery crossed the pontoon bridge from the right bank to the left. The mirage did not affect the air at the height of a bursting shell. We could see the shrapnel smoke unfolding two or three miles from the bank and wondered if it were the Turkish artillery or our own. "Shelling the advance posts," was the general verdict. It was not till later that we realised that the whole Force was at grips with the enemy; and it was not until we met the converging stream of wounded coming in from the trenches that we knew how costly the day had been.

They came limping in with stark faces over that mud-coloured flat. Very erect, some of them, with the stiffness of effort, and stoical with the sublime stoicism of the British soldier. "Beg pardon, sir," says a private in the Hants, "but can you tell me where the ambulance is?" And he deprecates the support of a shoulder though his calf is bandaged and it is painful for him to put a foot on the ground. "I am all right, sir. It is nothing serious." He lifts his shirt and points to a puncture in his stomach. His face is bloody and bandaged. "It is nothing," he explains; "took off a bit of my gums." He will not rest, but moves towards the distant Red Cross flag and the funnels of the steamer on the river. Here at least should be rest, warm tea or soup, and comfort for his wounds.

He had been wounded before, he said, in France. No doubt he had in his mind the smooth motor ambulance wagon, the nurses and the steaming kettles of France, the rapid transit to the hospital, where, an hour or two after he had received first aid, doctors and nurses were ready with every saving device that science can lend. Or he may have thought of Hampshire hospitals among the pines, windows that look on to apple orchards, doors that open into gardens and admit girls with books and flowers and fruit. Or the picture may have been the cheerful glow in a firelit room, for it was growing cold after the heat of the day. But here all was chaos. Three doctors and a hospital assistant. At five o'clock two tents had been put up and the wounded still poured in. More than a thousand came to this ambulance alone before ten o'clock and they lay like bales in the dark and cold with nobody to tend them. The British soldier tumbled to it that something had gone wrong; some new-comer would limp up and ask where he could find a doctor; then, discovering that any kind of aid was problematical, he would dispose himself philosophically on the ground. But the Indians did not understand. In France the Sirkar had never failed, and they thought now that appeals would bring some kind of god out of the machine. They clutched at one's feet imploring small services it was impossible to render because they were too many. "Water, water, sahib!" "Sahib, I am cold; cannot I have a blanket or a coat?" "Sahib, the blood will not stop running, I am growing faint." One lent what aid one could, but there were neither wraps, nor food, nor warm drink. The Providence that presided over these things seemed to think that the wounded would come in from a fight carrying their blankets and rations.

The stretchers ran short—there was one to fifty wounded. The regimental stretchers were taken away and not returned. Shattered limbs were laid on the jolting

transport carts; many must have died in them who might have been saved. An officer, wounded in the spine, groaned in agony at each plunge and bump of the cart over the caked mud and broken furrows. Another, seated on ammunition boxes, "couldn't stick it" and threw himself out.

At Basra we had met men who had been at Ctesiphon. We heard of wounded who had been carried nine miles from the battlefield to the ship in these carts. They are springless, made of wood and iron bars with a gridiron bottom, ordinarily employed for the carriage of equipment or supplies. Every jolt in them over this broken ground was like a deliberate blow; men with broken arms and legs were condemned in them to a prolonged agony. Generally there were no mattresses. To a twice-wounded man, who had made the journey before, they must have seemed like the tumbrils of the Revolution. To be consigned to one after hæmorrhage or with a wound in the stomach or about the spine meant death. Every doctor who packed such a case in the A.T. carts knew the man's fate as certainly as if he had signed his death-warrant. Yet these carts were tolerated in Mesopotamia as the normal ambulance conveyance for nearly two years.

All night long the wounded lay on the hard earth round the Red Cross flag, where they were deposited from the barbarous carts. At midnight I found two friends, officers of the Black Watch, shivering in their thin khaki. The cold was the more bitter after the heat of the day. Happily they were able to walk, and I got them on to the ship. At ten the next morning the three doctors were still working; they had forsworn sleep and food. The first batch of wounded came in on the 6th, a hundred or more, and they had barely evacuated these when the stream of the 7th began to pour in. They worked with no respite till noon on the 9th, dressing wounds. The crowd gradually spread along the bank

to the transport lines, 150 yards downstream. It had become too big to organise or direct; the doctors could only cope with the more serious cases immediately round them. All that it was humanly possible to do they did. Still the wounded were unfed. "Beg your pardon, sir," a Seaforth asks, "but can you tell me where I can get a bit of bread?" He had had nothing to eat since seven o'clock the morning before. When rations were brought there were no cooking pots or kettles, and there was more delay. Then lint ran short. Many received no treatment for days beyond the first field dressing applied by the regimental doctor where they fell.

On the evening of the 8th it rained. On the morning of the 9th, when the Turks had evacuated their position, more wounded were found, and brought in. On the right bank it was the same thing. A field ambulance with 100 beds converted by a stroke of the pen into a general hospital for a thousand! An Indian regiment was cooking in an improvised hospital the whole afternoon, but the wounded were so hungry they rushed the hospital. What with hunger, and weakness, and delay in treatment, many of the wounds became septic, and gangrene set in. The less serious cases were carried on to the boats, laid in rows on the deck with little shelter from the rain, and shipped downstream to the already congested hospital at Amara. Enough doctors could not be spared for the voyage, and many died for lack of attention on the way.

On January 18th, eleven days after the battle, the Meerut Divisional Stationary Hospital, with two ambulances, was passing Sheikh Saad on the way to the front. The medical officer in command landed and found 195 British and 800 Indian sick and wounded in an irregular camp pitched on muddy, filthy ground behind the village. The temporary lieutenant, who was the sole officer in charge of the Indians, was ill, worn out with

overstrain. He had no dressings left, and many of the wounded still had on the first field dressings which had been applied on the battlefield. Over a hundred were suffering from dysentery; and as there were no sweepers and no adequate sanitary arrangements, and the patients were too weak to walk, the state of the camp was indescribable. There was a pile of bags of *atta* and other stores dumped in the mud between the tents, half of it rotten with the rain. This, he was told, represented ten days' rations for the sick. But there was not enough food to go round; there were only one or two cooks, and most of the patients were too weak to help themselves. The officer in command wired to Headquarters for permission to open up his hospital on the spot. Sanction was granted. In the meanwhile a party of medical officers from the ambulances on board the ship had landed and were helping to dress the worst cases. A month later the hospital tents and operating gear arrived in a *mahaila* from Basra.

Happily there is no single person to whom the responsibility for Sheikh Saad can be brought home. Criticism of the higher medical staff in Mesopotamia has been unsparing. There was lack of courage, lack of imagination on the spot, and a criminal callousness among the higher authorities; but the root of the evil lay in the system. The Indian Army had been starved for years. "We never refused Mesopotamia anything on financial grounds," the Government of India said. And it was implied that the Staff in Basra was to blame for not insisting on more. But the Financial Member had so starved the army that they had lost the habit of asking. They did not believe it was any good. "Hospital barges! They never asked for them," was the astonished cry in Simla, and it is difficult to say whether the men who failed to ask, or the men who failed to provide, most deserve to be hanged. Yet the system was not responsible

for the whole magnitude of the disaster, At Ctesiphon, six weeks before Sheikh Saad, the misery, suffering and neglect of the wounded were Crimean. Then the Expeditionary Force was doubled and trebled by a stroke of the pen. The resources in the country might have been eked out further, but they were totally inadequate to meet the demand, and the field ambulances which should have been with the 7th Division when it reached Basra were still on the high seas. For this, circumstance was largely to blame. The original plan, as we have seen, was that the Division should be reorganised in Egypt. In this case, there being no particular urgency, the order of embarkation from Marseilles was not of vital consequence, and the officer responsible would be justified in squaring economy with opportunity and getting the different units off in the most suitable vessels that came to hand. Then we were confronted with the dilemma of Townshend's beleaguered force. This meant urgency, and the transports were sent ahead in the order in which they left Marseilles. Criticism would be ungenerous here, for one does not pause to consider the consequences of a chill, or the shock to a weakened heart, when one jumps overboard to save a drowning man.

It is better to leave it at this, for there can be no one so congenitally evil as to deserve to be made a scapegoat for the medical arrangements at Sheikh Saad.

Still, that other question raises itself, for the next three months an habitual ghost—Who was responsible for the impression that Townshend was in extremities—in such dire straits that we must needs run baldheaded against obstacles like these, crippling ourselves by every impediment that the enemy's guile or our own blind haste put in the way?

On the afternoon of the 8th a little regimental cemetery had been pegged out in the camp on the right bank of the river. Picture a narrow space between kick-

ing mules and gurgling camels and ammunition limbers on the Tigris bank. In the distance, seen through the slanting masts of the *mahailas* and the smoke of the transport steamers and monitors, the snow of the Pusht-i-Kuh is taking on a faint rose from the setting sun. The dead lie still and peaceful in their narrow graves, each with his dark blanket wound tightly round him like a mummy, and his name written on a page of a notebook and fixed to the fold with a pin. That short one is little K——, who left his newspaper in Fleet Street six months ago; this long one is A——, artist and musician, "who just passed the doctor." His long, thoughtful face and delicate hands are rudely interred here. Soon the padre will come and read the service over them. For verdure there is the *kharnoob* and the *agoon*, and for a tombstone a wooden cross cut out of a packing-case: "Private —— of the ——shires." "Captain —— of the ——shires." Born in a smooth grass country; buried in this hard, inhospitable clay of Sheikh Saad.

As the fatigue party dig and prepare the last bivouac for the dead, the wounded of yesterday, swathed in their bloody bandages, stand on the bank a few feet apart, smoking and chatting, and watching the shells burst with the clearness of magnesium wire against the opal and violet haze in the west. There is a baneful beauty in the shrapnel flashes, and one forgets that they are making more dead. It takes about two days to get used to these things. The crowd on the bank might be watching a football match; across the river an actual football is rising and falling to desultory kicks.

It is now almost dark, but a serious, scholarly-looking Scot leans against the bank, straining his eyes over a *Times* broadsheet. A few hours ago he was fighting, as his bandages attest; for the moment he is far away in other climes going rural rides with Cobbett, or reading Walton's account of the marriage of Richard Hooker in

or about the year 1583, or listening to the voice of George Herbert who tells him that

> "Man is all symmetric,
> Full of proportions, one limbe to another."

I feel a touch on the shoulder. A subaltern friend has come up from behind, hopping over the mud traverses between the graves of this improvised cemetery. "Hullo, Eye-Witness," he cries, and greets me with a favourite aphorism, "War is a much over-rated pastime." But neither of us smiles as our eyes wander from the draped mummies to the line of approaching stretcher-bearers.

For the wounded still pour in. Darkness falls and lamps reveal their pale, stark faces. One catches a glimpse of a face exposed from the eye socket to the teeth, yet still humanly staring. Out on the field there are dead still lying where they fell. One man I think of lying where he had dropped, his rifle and bayonet sticking upright in front of him, driven into the earth by the force of his forward plunge.

Life and death have their true proportions here. Life is a gift that is rendered back to the Giver without a thought. Death is no more than a turn at the corner of the dark road we have been treading blindly. And to those who approach the turn, whether to halt or pass on, the springs of commiseration are mercifully dammed.

Still, one wonders, will there ever come a term to killing or maiming as a legitimate form of human endeavour; and for answer one hears, the whole night long, the even, monotonous, unbroken thud of musketry, like the creak of transport wagons or the tread of mules on hard clay.

CHAPTER VI

THE MODERN CORRESPONDENT

On the morning of the 10th I breakfasted with what was left of the Black Watch. I found them clean shaven, well groomed, and cheerful after a night in the mud. I heard the adjutant's jolly, infectious, spontaneous laugh afar off, and was guided by it to the mess table. It was a small camp. The mess of twenty-seven had shrunk to nine. The adjutant was untouched; there were four subalterns, the padre, the doctor, the quartermaster and the transport officer. They greeted me with huge delight, for no one with the ghost of a sense of humour could help being amused at the presence of an "accredited Correspondent" at Sheikh Saad.

There is an ironic humour in the title of "Eye-Witness" for a man who may observe but not speak, "see but not touch," as they used to say in the nursery. For the modern War Correspondent is the most dependent, disciplined, spoon-fed creature alive. He is both blinkered and muzzled. His essays in euphemism are a source of amusement to the whole Force.

"Hullo, Eye-Witness! Have you told them how——?" "Have you written about the medical arrangements?" "I hope you strafed the Staff." "Cable to the British Public to address their letters to General Townshend, c/o Turkish Gendarmerie, Baghdad." "Rabbit, by jove. Where did you get it, Findlayson? Not rations?" And we fell to discussing the relative succulence of tinned rabbit and bully beef.

Here was one of the finest regiments in the British

Army, twice reborn since the beginning of the war, and wiped out again on an obscure field in which there was no glory save that of sacrifice, and they made less fuss over it than a farmer would have made over a brood of chickens spoiled by a fox in the night.

There was one modest, callow boy among them, since dead, a boy of the new type, not of the old, but accepted of the old in the light of new standards as "one of the best," and "well liked" by the men. He said to me quite simply: "I am afraid you will miss many faces." In London, looking over the casualty list in the morning paper, one might have pictured dejection in the small surviving group, but I found their cheerfulness warming as the sun. The psychology of it was perfectly plain to me out there. It is the only way to play the big game. Eight wickets down and devilish little on the board. Still, they may carry their bats; they may even win. Other things don't count; things outside which fill the papers are small beer; the only thing that matters is that the regiment has carried on.

Very refreshing to "Eye-Witness" after his smug dispatches is the talk of the regimental officer. There has never been a "show" on which the British officer has not "groused" at everything and everybody in his half-amused, half-cynical, long-suffering way; and in Mesopotamia the gods and the Staff offered lavish material on which to exercise his wit. The air in every mess was thick and laden with the frankest criticism. The brigadier curses the Government, and repeats daily that every member of it ought to be hanged on a tree. The infantry abuses the cavalry, and says they are "out to graze," and will never admit that the artillery have touched the enemy's trenches. "They made very good shooting yesterday, only they forgot to arrange that any Turks should be there." And the gunner is hugely amused at the Navy men in their monitor, who "make

strange noises and scatter their obuses over the sand." Defend the seamen's markmanship and he may admit generously: "I believe he's damned good at shinning up a ladder."

The Staff, of course, is always fair game. "Turks shell our Staff? Not likely. They are a damned sight too valuable to the enemy where they are. They'd strafe the gunner who raised a finger against them." Then the transport officer lifts up his voice. The sappers had loaded his barge with the planks of a pontoon bridge right across his hatches, under which is the grain for a cavalry regiment to be issued the same night. On the top of that comes an order from the Staff to have the barge cleared by four o'clock. The S. and T. man does not blaspheme; his peculiar vehicle is irony. "I suppose they have found out in a book somewhere," he says, "that a barge can be unloaded in three hours." All this is as refreshing as sea air to "Eye-Witness" after his disciplined, modulated bleatings, whether it be the irony of the brigadier who speaks of "the wisdom of the Higher Command," or the jolly impudence of the "Sub."

But the most universally execrated institution in Mesopotamia was the censorship. An officer arriving in the country and finding this network of inhibition round him had a sense of being trapped. It was impossible to communicate freely with the outside world. Things were evidently going wrong, and this fussy, meddling supervision, this constant fear of anything discreditable leaking out, did not increase one's confidence in "the Higher Command." It was the most disquieting thing—if one looked down to the roots of it—about the whole campaign. Victories are not won by a Government with these preoccupations. One looked for a strong hand, sighed for the Nelson or the Drake touch, and all the while felt that one was being strangled by red tape. The strong man was in Kut. In the meantime the only activity that

was being well run was this scratching up of earthworks against inspection from without. Earthworks completed with much blinking of the eyelids in the face of hard, uncomfortable facts, and ostrich-like burrowings of the head.

Not only are the Correspondent's cables mutilated; his articles appear with their vitals torn out; the language in which they see the light is not his own; the heavy official hand bears down any distinctive or individual touch. But think of the Censor's point of view. He must take no chances. Better spoil a hundred articles than give one slip of intelligence away that might be useful to the Turk. The enemy would be glad of any hint of our losses, resources, reinforcements, difficulties, deficiencies in our transport or supply, our method of going to work or any preoccupation we may have in mind. He may be as well posted in our dispositions as we are ourselves, but it is not our business to make things easier for him by the confirmation of the data he has at hand. The Correspondent is a knave who will not recognise all this. But when the censorship is used not so much to conceal facts from the enemy as to give definite impressions to people at home, there will come moments when he will feel a certain knavish complicity in carrying on his job.

It was not the censors on the spot who were to blame. They were loyal to the system imposed. Had they passed anything which might discredit the doctrine of official infallibility the offence would have been removed by more responsible hands. Telegraphic dispatches from Mesopotamia were censored at Tigris Corps Headquarters, released at Basra, censored there again by General Headquarters, forwarded to Karachi, whence one copy went to Army Headquarters, Delhi. On orders from A.H.Q., Delhi, Bombay forwarded the dispatch to the Press Association, London, by whom it was submitted for final censorship to the Press Bureau, London. But in each

bureau de passage different heads, military and political, had to be consulted; diverse, and sometimes conflicting, notions of expediency had to be reconciled; and thus it sometimes happened that very little of the original communication saw the light.

Candour, conviction, weight—save in the sense of mere heaviness—are far from the Correspondent's reach. It would be impossible, of course, for a general in the field to have an amateur critic in his camp discussing his conduct of the campaign, and pointing out, in the light of after events, where he has gone wrong. Direct criticism is out of the question, but it is difficult to write of anything without veiled criticism of some kind. Nothing can be truthfully described which does not reflect by inference upon someone. Yet the most oblique criticism is ruled out. Aspersion may be cast only upon the Turk or the Hun; and the more he is aspersed the better pleased everybody will be—a fact which helps to explain the iniquity of the other side in all theatres of the war.

Even praise is difficult, because it involves selection; and selection involves comparison; and comparison is odious. Thus every statement becomes so hedged about with modifications that it conveys nothing at all. Your military censor discovers an ambush in every phrase. He has an instinct amounting to genius which protects the red tab from the Correspondent's oblique flank fire. An expression which implies that operations have not been carried through with clockwork precision in accordance with the plans originally laid down, or that the movements of the enemy have not fallen in with the nice calculations of the Staff, carries with it an implicit criticism and is ruled out.

But where the accurate prevision of the Staff is difficult to demonstrate the Correspondent must be silent, and this leaves him very little to write about. There is the transport, of course, and the humours and miseries of

the campaign; but the humours are invariably discreditable to someone, and too much misery is discouraged. It depresses people at home and gives satisfaction to the enemy. So neither pain, nor profanity, bungling, incompetence, nor mischance must come into the picture at all, though in every campaign these are the daily companions of the march.

Of the people of the country and its borderlands, of Arab, Persian, or Turk, and of political relations in general it was impossible to write. One must not speak of Haji William lest some dull-head should take it in literal earnest. The Indians were not supposed to know that the Germans were preaching the Jehad. Nor was it considered expedient to disparage any class of Arab, lest he should read the offending passage and feel hurt. After all there were potential friends among these stout fellows who mutilated our wounded and dug up our graves. It would not do to sow seeds of dissension, nor to let neutrals think that the people of Mesopotamia did not welcome us with open arms. The expression "friendly Arab" drew a warning that no turn of phrase should be used which implied that all Arabs were not friendly. Thus our friend the Buddoo came to be officially designated as a "marauder in Turkish pay." Later, in Baghdad, the official synonym for the Arab when he resorted to violence was "Kurds and others." It was a grave mistake, too, to insinuate that the Shiah received the same privileges in our courts as the Sunni, since this would offend the Sunni, who under the Turkish régime had had everything his own way; and of course nothing remotely disrespectful could be written about "the esteemed neutral," Persia, whom we had hoped to convert into an ally; while the mere thought of the Wali of Pusht-i-Kuh or the Bakhtiari Khans frowning over their morning copy of *The Times* filled the official mind with the most disquieting apprehensions.

There may have been reason in a good deal of this. No doubt much of it was wisely considered in view of the timorous policy of conciliation by which we are guided. Yet the whole system seemed to be wrong. It was all part of our Government's shrinking sensitiveness to criticism which defeats its own end, seeking always the middle way. We might have commanded confidence and respect if we had gone straight ahead and done the thing which seemed best, thinking more of the action than of the light in which it appeared. As it was, we equivocated with such a simple faith in the credulity of others, and with such a palpable desire to please, that not a soul in India or anywhere else believed a word we said.

Another preoccupation of the Censor which is not so generally recognised is his sense of propriety. No pedagogue could be more fastidious than he in the removal of the offensive word or suggestion, and the result is a smugness which savours more of the meeting-house than of the field of battle. In a campaign everything is conducted as it ought to be. Divine service is held every Sunday; nobody is ever hungry or thirsty, for the transport is always up to time; the health of the troops is good, their spirits are unflagging; they laugh and joke every hour of the day, but chiefly in the cannon's mouth; the deserving are decorated, and sometimes even the undeserving; and, thanks to the wisdom and experience of the Staff, who are guided always by a nice compromise between enterprise and caution, no lives are lost which might have been saved, nor battles lost which might have been won. And that is why our soldiers after eighteen months of the war wait in glorious impatience to be "up and at 'em" again, and soon tire of leave, or would tire of leave if they could get it, and long to be back in the firing-line again.

I remember in Tibet describing the dirt and discomfort and cold of the old fort at Phari, and giving a picture

of a group of ruffianly-looking officers, disreputable as Bill Sikes, their beards covered with grime. In my dispatch "they were seated over a yak-dung fire and drinking rum." The general eliminated "rum" and substituted "tea." "Rum," he said, would give a quite erroneous idea to people at home of the dissipation of our troops. "Yak-dung," of course, went by the board as indelicate, so that "the officers sat over a fire drinking tea." In another article I made a Pathan speak of the prospect of loot, but in the Censor's version he talked about the grandeur of a city he would not see. He had to be pipe-clayed into the uniform smugness. That is to say, he was no longer a Pathan, though you might have taken him for a youth on a Cook's tour anxious to improve his mind and carry away lantern slides for the edification of his brother tribesmen. "Eye-Witness" has to lend himself, or his name, to this sort of thing. He is eminently respectable. And herein lies the gulf between the new style and the old. In the old days the War Correspondent was not always respectable, but he was respected; to-day he is respectable, but he is unrespected. For if there is any subject which needs to be treated in its naked truth it is war. The gloss that has been cast over it has contributed to its survival. Realism as relentless as in Zola's "La Débâcle" should glow through it. But the modern Correspondent has to dip his brush in chalk and water. His wounded heroes may not even bleed. The picture he must draw of the soldier in battle is the pipe-clayed figure which Dick Heldar drew and Torpenhow destroyed.

This is a long digression from the breakfast-table of the Black Watch; but the difficulties of the accredited Correspondent are illuminating in many ways, and a relation of them will help a student of contemporary history as expounded in the newspapers to read between the lines.

Few of the Black Watch were left to laugh at my

description of Sheikh Saad when it reached us in the newspapers some two months after the event. My narrative of the battle had been fined down to the description of a flight of sand-grouse and the picture of the wounded private steering for the distant Red Cross flag and the funnels of the steamers on the river, and the paragraph ended, "Here at last should be rest, warm tea, and comfort for his wounds." I had very delicately insinuated that one could not expect the same medical resources in Mesopotamia as were available in France. But the Censor had left it at that, implying that the soldier received the three consolations he hungered for.

"By Jove! He has scored over you there, Eye-Witness! He has made capital out of it."

And a roar of laughter went up, with a certain tribute of admiration in it for the censorship which could make capital out of the wounded at Sheikh Saad.

I had long given up the attempt to get anything through. I was quite reconciled to being muzzled so long as the blinkers were not put on. For the old style of War Correspondent is no more, and no combination of circumstance can revive him, though it is pleasant to picture him a kind of dashing brigand, free companion, a blend of courage, intellect and resource, passing through perilous adventures, playing for his own hand, appearing, disappearing, reappearing in the most dramatic manner, mixed up in a cavalry charge, carrying dispatches, consulted by generals, a free lance welcomed wherever his wits found him entrance, and all the world waiting for his *coup* and ready to acclaim it.

To-day a *coup* is a crime. But it is a crime for which nobody is likely to be hanged. A Correspondent nowadays does not take frontiers in his stride, threading the enemy's picquets by night to send off a dispatch which will electrify all Europe the next morning. He has to write very much what he is told, and his message is a semi-

official sop to an impatient public. His output is the square of his conscience and his ingenuity. He must not forestall, much less contradict, the official communiqué; he may only embroider it.

Nevertheless, the life of "Eye-Witness" has its compensations. His movements are free. Nobody bothers much what he does, or where he goes, so long as he is mum. I soon began to realise that but for this single infringement of liberty, the liberty of speech, I was as free as any member of the Expedition. I doubt if any other Correspondent in the war was allowed to see so much or say so little.

It was through sheer bad luck that I missed the next engagement, the Battle of the Wadi. I have mentioned that the gods and the Staff were an alternate whetstone for the wit and profanity of the Force; but for the next two weeks the gods had things very much their own way. In Mesopotamia, as at Troy, they came down and took part, but always on the other side. For we were in a country of excess, where the elements are never moderate or in humour; and there was something almost Biblical in the way the deities of this ancient land conspired to punish us. There was malice in the sky and soil; malice of heat and drought; hunger and thirst and flies; damp and cold, fever and ague, flood, hurricane and rain; and malice interwoven in the web of circumstance. Allah was certainly with the Kaiser and Islam.

It is the general rule that a disturbance of the elements favours the defensive. During an attack mere mud may be worth an army corps to the defenders of a position; and for the next few weeks mud and rain were the allies of the enemy. But our immediate "strafing" was a hurricane which made navigation impossible. I was imprisoned by it on my ship anchored in midstream, unable to land or to go ahead, and I had lost the first line transport of the Black Watch the day before, or rather it had

lost itself, and never caught the regiment till after the battle.

A few days afterwards wind and floods broke down our bridge of boats, destroying our mobility, and forcing us to play into the hands of the enemy by a frontal attack on the left bank of the river. The hurricane that carried away our pontoons was on the 16th. In the meanwhile we had our chance of circumventing the Turk in the Battle of the Wadi.

CHAPTER VII

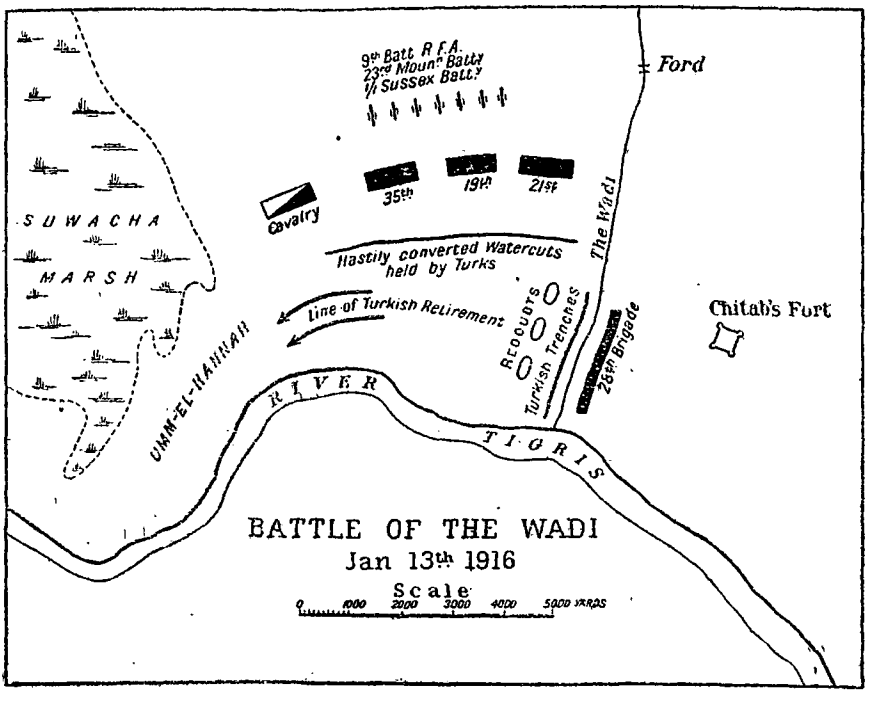
THE BATTLE OF THE WADI

GREAT hopes were built on the action of January 13th. The Turks were holding the far banks of the Wadi, the steep-banked stream which runs into the Tigris from the Pusht-i-Kuh hills, seven miles north-west of Sheikh Saad. Behind them was the Suwacha Marsh, which at its most southerly limit extended in January to within a mile and a half of the river. It was a bold position for the enemy to take up, for if we could get in behind them and hold the narrow bottle-neck in their rear, their whole army, estimated at 15,000, would have been rounded up. To effect this *coup* was the object of the operations of January 12th-14th.

Three main causes have been mentioned as contributing to its miscarriage. First, the delay of the artillery in crossing the Wadi, which held the column back several hours. Secondly, the insufficiency of the troops at our disposal for so wide an enveloping movement. Thirdly, the inaccuracy of maps and our imperfect knowledge of the ground. Of these the third was, no doubt, the direct cause of failure. The delay might have been made good; the troops, as events proved, could have closed in the ring; the essential obstacle to success was that they did not know where they were.

The 28th Brigade was detailed for the frontal attack, the 21st, 19th and 35th for the turning movement. The force, which was under the command of General Younghusband, made a night march on the 12th. The morning of the 13th was misty, and the column advanced

in echelon, the 21st Brigade on the left, the 19th in the centre, and the 35th on the right, the cavalry brigade guarding the right flank and operating on the right front. The three infantry brigades crossed the Wadi without opposition and with little delay; but the steep banks of the stream held back the artillery and transport while



the pioneers were improving the crossing. The guns were not all over until nearly one. Some of the transport could not cross till dark.

The 21st Brigade, who were heading south-west for the narrow neck between the swamp and the river at El Hannah, began to meet with opposition at 11 a.m., and the advanced guard came under heavy machine-gun and rifle fire, and dug itself in within 200 yards of the enemy. It was reinforced by two companies of the 9th Gurkhas. The other two companies of the regiment

were moved to the left, forming a flank protection, while the remainder of the brigade deployed to the right. On their right the 19th Brigade was brought forward and deployed in pursuance of the enveloping movement which was to outflank the enemy and reach the river. The 35th Brigade was held in reserve.

At twelve the attack was checked to wait for the remainder of the guns to come up from the Wadi. At one all the guns were in action. At 1.30 the 21st Brigade had advanced to within 300 yards of the enemy. Small parties of Turks could be seen hurrying up from reserved posts to man the entrenched line against which the attack of the 19th Brigade was developing. This brigade was closely engaged with the enemy at 2.30. Just about this time our airmen saw a body of Turks, estimated at about 3,000, leave their front trenches and retire along the river bank to the position they held on the following day.

The 35th Brigade prolonged the right of the 19th, but neither they nor the cavalry on their right were able to reach the river. Each in its turn was met by trenches thrown out on the Turkish flank. No reconnaissance had reported the entrenched line parallel to the river, some two or three miles from it, extending from the extreme north of the enemy's position on the Wadi, and affording him flank cover in his retreat to the gap. As a matter of fact these were not prepared trenches, but hastily converted water-cuts thrown up on the day of the fight. Along this line the enemy offered stout resistance. Still, there is little doubt that we could have broken through had we known our country.

The truth is that the map was at fault. In this flat, featureless country there are no landmarks. We were quite in the dark as to the enemy's position in relation to the Wadi and the Tigris. As at Sheikh Saad, our detour was not wide enough. We were drawn in too much on our left. We never reached the point at which we should

have turned south on to the river, or we reached it too late. The 28th Brigade, which was pressing the frontal attack, was never in communication with the three brigades which were making the enveloping movement, none of which during the whole of that day's operations had so much as a glimpse of the river. Their losses were very much heavier than they would have been had their assault been closely connected with the flank attack delivered by the rest of the division. The cavalry's line of advance was directed on the fort, which, so inadequate was our intelligence, they believed to be on the left bank of the river.

The Turks were not to be caught napping. They had foreseen the obvious tactics which the nature of the ground forced upon us, and prepared their resistance accordingly. So confident were they in the holding power of their flanks that they held their ground on the bank of the Wadi while our troops were engaged several miles in their rear and threatened to close them in completely. It was a near thing, but the favour of Allah and their own doggedness saved them. Darkness set in before the cavalry had a target, and the enemy made good their retreat through the interval that lay open between our lines and the Tigris. It was not known, and it can never be known, how far our cavalry were from the river when night put a close to this singularly ineffectual day.

The force moved on the next morning to hold the neck, but found the Turk strongly entrenched there. Here we bivouacked to await the arrival of guns and supplies; and the line taken up by us then was, allowing for slight extensions to reduce the interval between our flank and the marsh, the line which we held when we made the next attack on the 21st of January.

The 28th Brigade, who delivered the frontal attack on the Wadi position, suffered the heaviest casualties. Had it been a mere holding attack, they might have come

off more lightly; but their orders were to drive the Turk out of his trenches, which commanded the steep banks of the watercourse, and against which they had to advance with little cover. The Staff reported that the position was lightly held, and that the Turks were beginning to evacuate. The ground was dotted with low bushes, and there was a shallow irrigation cut fifty yards from the stream which must have been in full view of the enemy. Of the Turks' position the brigade saw nothing. Maps issued to the regimental officers did not show the Wadi. The major commanding the assaulting battalion explained to his officers and sepoys in Hindustani that there was "a little water close to and in front of the enemy's trenches." When the regiment reached the irrigation channel they thought it was the water of which they had been warned. The Wadi itself was invisible until they came right up to it.

A general idea of the nature of this assault may be gleaned from the experience of a single battalion. The 56th Rifles came in for a terrific fire at 800 yards. The bullets were all low, from a foot to three feet above the ground, and mowed them down in swathes as they advanced. The Pathans rushed forward with loud yells. Each time they rose their ranks were thinned. When they reached the irrigation cut, 50 per cent. of their machine-gun squad were put out of action. Had they halted in the channel and held the Turks to their trenches pending the flanking movement of the rest of the column their casualties would not have been so heavy, but they had been ordered to take the position. It was in that hopeless advance over the little strip of land between the water-cut and the stream that most of them fell. Thirty-one of their dead were found in this small space the next morning. At dusk, when there was no longer any hope of support, the regiment retired to the channel.

All this meant another heavy drain on the division

that was marching to the relief of Kut. The losses at Sheikh Saad and the Wadi alone had reached a total equal to that of more than half the beleaguered force, and heavier losses were to come. If the Staff could have seen the Turkish front at the Wadi it is doubtful if they would have given the order to take it by assault while the enveloping force was working round behind the position. To a judgment tempered by realities a holding attack would have sufficed here. The steep shelving banks with the stream between made a deadly obstacle at the end of an advance across an open bullet-swept plain, and if any remnants had crossed and reached the parapet alive they could never have established a footing in the face of disciplined fire. The good old days when the general advanced with his troops, and indicated the point of attack with a wave of his hand, are no more. His business is with maps and wires in a screened tent; he is the brain, not the pulse, of the machine.

In the meanwhile the regimental officer may see what he sees, but he must listen to the distant voice at the end of the wire. The unquestioning gallantry of "the Six Hundred" has been rivalled or eclipsed every day of the war. The act of heroism which Tennyson has made historic, reverenced so long as a bright, unapproachable standard, has become the soldier's matter-of-fact, commonplace routine.

The major commanding the battalion I have mentioned was shot in the side as he left the water-cut; he was heard calling out to his men in Hindustani, "Forward, brave fellows! Go ahead. I am down. But to-day the regiment will win honour. Let none hold back." The subaltern by his side had been killed trying to get his machine-guns up; two of these were now out of action, their squads shot down. Lieutenant ——, wounded twice in the arm, would not stop; wounded again twice in the chest, he fell. His orderly, Ghulab Khan, implored the

Sahib to allow him to carry him back, but he insisted that every man should go on. He died of his wounds the next morning. Sepoy Boota Singh brought in man after man under heavy fire. Of enormous physique himself and devoid of fear, he went out five times, lifted the wounded man on his back and carried him in. On his sixth journey he was shot dead. A lance-havildar put up a screen of earth round his British officer and stayed with him till dusk, when he carried him back to better cover. Akbar Khan, bugle major, died of exhaustion. No wounds were found on him, or blood; he had had fever for three days, but would not be left behind. Others went on wounded until they were shot down.

It would be a long roll of chivalry that recorded a tithe of the gallant deeds performed by a single battalion in a day's action, many of them unnoticed, or witnessed only by others who have fallen. Those I have quoted were told me by a wounded officer after the action. He told me many other things which the men of his regiment had done; and it is because I had the story fresh from him that I have described the frontal attack delivered on January 13th from the point of view of a single battalion. This regiment was probably neither more nor less gallant than the others in the brigade. Such achievements were repeated all down the line; and in the force carrying out the enveloping movement the same dogged resistance was met and countered.

The Wadi was but one of many obscure fights in Mesopotamia which have had no laureate to celebrate them. So frequent were they that the men in the camp a few miles off knew little of what had happened and asked few questions when they had learnt the fate of their personal friends. Even the Correspondent on the spot must be silent, or speak of the B's and C's and D's, a mere formula of chivalry, and not very warming to the heart. The enemy know exactly whom they have

opposed to them. Casualty lists, the uniforms of the dead and prisoners, intelligence through spies, keep them well informed. Yet achievements which would thrill the whole country and carry particular pride and incitement to honour into special parts of it, were glossed over and obscured lest the enemy should discover what they already knew—that the men who rushed their trenches and left their dead in them are associated with Ayrshire, Leicester or Devon.

The Staff officer's point of view is very intelligible. "The enemy may have many sources of information," he argues, "but it is difficult for them to be certain of the constitution of our forces. Any official or officially recognised intelligence is the greatest help to them, and it is our business to see that they do not get it. Pretty pictures and elegant writing are all very well in their way, but our first business is to wear down the Turk."

That is an argument which should silence the Correspondent on the spot. He answers it in peril of casuistry, for his judgment may be warped by an undue sense of the importance of his own work. Obviously the essential thing is to wear down the Turk, and the men who are doing it must be given a clear field and a free hand. The man at home who has nothing to do with newspapers may weigh the case impartially and decide whether the darkness and mystery in which our gallant deeds are shrouded hinder the enemy more than they injure us by the film they cast on the mirror of chivalry.[1]

Personally I think, though I may be biased, that when Sergeant MacDonald, of the Black Watch, holds the traverse until the last man in his regiment is out,

[1] In July 1917, eighteen months after these words were written, the Army Council decided that, "for the future, Press communiqués dealing with military operations should, wherever possible, contain mention of regiments which have particularly distinguished themselves." I received a memorandum to this effect, but I was never permitted by the Censors in Mesopotamia to mention any regiment by name.

and falls when he follows him into the zone of death, every member of his clan should know—and know, too, that he had offered the same ungrudging sacrifice a hundred times in the war. And this news should not be cautiously withheld, but published at the moment in letters of gold, and written on every sheet that finds its way into an Ayrshire or Perthshire home. And the achievements of Ram Das or Akbar Khan should be discussed—no matter with what additions—by the gossips under the *peepul* tree in every Indian village that has sent men to the war.

There is great value to England in the recital of these deeds, and little value to the enemy in being told that his ranks have been thinned by regiments whose presence has been advertised only too well by the dead they have left behind and by their prominence in the Roll of Honour.

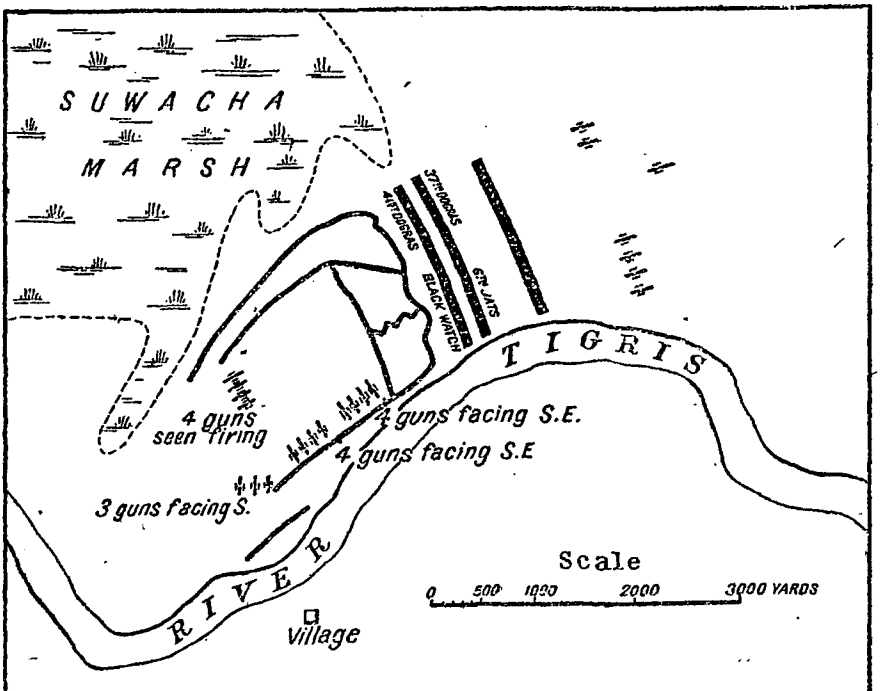
CHAPTER VIII

THE BATTLE OF UMM-EL-HANNAH

In the actions of January 5th and January 13th impatience, faulty intelligence and an unjustifiable contempt for the enemy resources had cost us dear. We had played into his hands with our frontal attacks; and now, it seemed, necessity compelled us to repeat the manœuvre. With our bridge destroyed, the Turk firmly planted in the neck of land between the marsh and the river, and the hand of that visionary hour-glass at Kut running low, there was nothing for it but to break through. No one would have believed it then, had they been told that Townshend could have held out till the end of March, till the river had gone down and risen again, till a new bridge of boats had been built and destroyed, and a new army collected and wasted. Had we known this, the tragic and futile affair of January 21st might have been averted. Communication and support trenches would have been dug and our reserves would have been spared the advance over 2,000 yards of open ground under heavy fire.

Since the attack had to be driven home right into the enemy's front, it was determined that on this occasion at least there should be no lack of artillery support and gun preparation. Batteries were ferried over to the right bank to enfilade the Hannah position. At noon on the 20th the Turkish front line trenches were subjected to a bombardment lasting twenty minutes from all our guns, and a similar bombardment was arranged for the morning of the 21st, preparatory to the assault.

We had in all, for a front of 1,400 yards, one section of 4-in. guns, two batteries of 5-in., and one of 4.5 howitzers, three batteries of 18-pounders, two sections of a mountain battery, two monitors, and one Territorial battery of 15-pounders. With the concentrated fire of



THE BATTLE OF UMM-EL-HANNAH
January 21st 1916.
Shewing the position of the Regiments which launched the attack The nearest troops behind our second line were 1000 yards from the Turks

these guns we hoped to demoralise the Turk and destroy his defences. But he was not easily dislodged.[1]

[1] It is interesting to compare the weight of metal expended on the El Hannah trenches on January 20th and 21st with that concentrated upon a similar frontage at Loos on October 15th, 1915. In the case of Loos the bombardment lasted two hours. We had three 15-in. howitzers (350-lb. shells), nine 9.2 howitzers, four batteries of 8-in. howitzers, one 12-in. howitzer, one 12-in. naval gun, two 9.2 guns, numerous 60-pounders and 4.7's; and in addition to these between 400 and 500 field guns and howitzers.

On the night of the 20th our firing line was entrenched within 200 yards of the enemy, but there were no communication trenches, and in the advance the reserves had to come up in the open over a distance of 2,000 yards. We all thought the 21st would be the proof, and that if we could not break through the Turkish lines then, we never would. We thought of the hard-pressed garrison at Kut awaiting us, and believed that it was in the last straits. Our tents were struck; everything was ready for the advance.

I started in the dark, and after blundering a little way in the mud waited for a sign of light in the east. I had soon forgotten the bloody business in hand; for the sun rises and sets with an unfailing glory in this flat land; all the beauty and colour that should be in the earth is gathered into the sky. Opening streaks of light, or rather streaks of black and purple cloud thrown against the light, a faint opalescent glimmer, heralded the dawn. Faint violet columns of smoke rose from the camp fires, against which the figures of men rising and stooping seemed like colossi, and in the mist the full moon hung in a mesh of washy indigo cloud.

I had thought that we would attack at dawn; it would have been better if we had; the last lap into the Turkish trenches might have been less deadly in the half-light. But when I reached the Divisional Staff they told me that we were waiting for the bombardment, which was to begin at 7.45. The gunners needed half an hour's daylight to check the registering marks. We were to let the Turks have it for twenty minutes, and then mop them up when we went in.

At dawn the rifle fire began, and the tap-tap-tap of the maxim, steady and continuous with vibrations, like two men wrestling in an alternate grip, tightening and relaxing. If the concentrated fire of our guns was to be anything like the bombardment of the 20th it would

be a good moment to approach our trenches while the minimum of enemy lead was flying about. I went a mile ahead and waited.

When the bombardment began I went on. Columns of earth rose over the Turkish lines, and pillars of smoke, green, white and brown and yellow, and columns of water when a stray shell—Turkish, no doubt—plunged into the Tigris. I was glad we had the bulk of the guns on our side. All this shell fire should have been a covering roof to our advance, but the Turk, it appeared, was not sheltering as he ought. He was by no means "doggo." His bullets at first were barely audible in the din, no louder than the "tweet" of a whin-chat, but there was a good deal of earth flying round, and there were mysterious splashings in the river and the flooded nullahs. I passed a doctor friend in an advance ambulance making hot tea. He gave me a cup. As we drank, the B's came by in support and occupied an empty trench on our left. They were laughing and joking; but it was a husky kind of fun, and there was no gladness in it, for everyone knew that this was going to be a bloody day. These frontal positions on the illimitable flat are the very devil. One of them tripped up on a telephone wire. "Not wounded yet!" his pal cried. Just then another stumbled to an invisible stroke and did not rise. A man ahead was singing nervously,

"That's not the girl I saw you with at Brighton."

A stretcher-bearer brought the wounded man in, and I went on a trench or two with the B's.

In the next trench a sergeant showed me his bandolier. A sharp-nosed bullet had gone through three rounds of ammunition and stuck in the fourth during the last rush forward. We had a minute or two in which to talk and smoke. One makes friends easily at times like

these and drops reserve. He told me where he lived, his trade before the war, how many brothers he had serving, and how in his wife's family there were three brothers killed and wounded, one missing, one a prisoner, and two serving in France. We did not mention Mesopotamia. There was nothing which was not palpable to be said.

It is these huge stretches of open that take the wind and stomach out of one. I remembered being told by a man that his feet were coldest when lying under fire with the supports. "You work yourself up in the last lap," he said, "and let things go; but away behind one thinks too much. There is lead about, but it does not count. When one waits a long while it is like being with a dentist who is fumbling with his forceps in a drawer." And he swore that he had enjoyed a certain hell-fire spurt in France. I could conceive the impulse that carried one over those last 200 yards as the impulse of a lifetime. But to most of my friends this kind of thing was becoming their daily bread. The men I was with were mostly a new draft. I could see they were nervous, but they were very brave. Word was passed along to advance to the next bit of cover.

In the next trench were two Jats. One was wounded in the foot and the other was looking after him, scooping out the earth with a pick, and digging himself deeper in. It was here that I began to argue with myself as to how much an "Eye-Witness" should see. He must certainly see something or he would not be an "Eye-Witness." On the other hand he must not see too much, for it is also his business to record. This was a comforting thought with its logical conclusion that it was most certainly the duty of an "Eye-Witness" to survive battles. And so after a little casuistry I persuaded myself that I had seen exactly enough. When the B's went on I remained in the trench.

Left alone with the Jats I moralised upon courage

with a curious mixture of thankfulness and shame that I was not attacking in the first line. I was filled with a great contempt for everything and everybody civil, more especially for politicians and war correspondents in khaki. The only men who counted were the men who took trenches, or died in taking them.

The rifle and maxim fire ahead was continuous, like hail on a corrugated iron roof. The B's would soon be in it. I waited eagerly for some intermission, but it did not relax or recede, and I knew that the Turks must be holding on. The bullets were growing thicker. They came over with a vicious, ironic whistle, a sucking noise, a "gluck" like a snipe leaving mud; and there was the squeal and rattle of shrapnel. The Jat ducked with a melancholy dignity as a fragment of shell tore the air like rent canvas and pitched in the earth behind. Then our own came over, a slow-travelling, friendly rustling howitzer, shelling their supports—a wobbling eighteen-pounder with its driving-band loose. Two kingfishers hung over the trench by the river, and a lark dropped a foot or two in the air at each concussion, but did not leave her beat. The bird's preoccupation through all this din reminded me of the mess man had made of things, and I felt the same envy for the sanity of nature which one feels when one looks into the quiet face of a horse.

The Jat continued gravely to dig. With his pick in one hand he was hollowing out an impregnable cave in the forward wall of the trench for his friend; and as he dug, he lamented in his sad fatalistic way, in his far-away voice, that he had ever been taken away from France. "Sahib, sâf maidan hai!" "Sahib, it is undiluted plain. There is no cover. Why do we not attack by night? In France, Sahib——" and he sang the praises of the fair land of France, and reviled the sodden Biblical plain for which we were fighting in terms with which I could well agree.

After a time things became monotonous in the trench with the Jats. The day was yet young, and I began to think about making my escape. I thought I had heard a break in the fire as if we were pushing through. Then it grew in intensity; it was nearer, if anything, and became so heavy and unintermittent that I was afraid the attack had failed. I wanted to find one of the brigadiers and learn how things were going.

Just then the Jat called to me that there was a white soldier wounded badly in the leg. I looked up over the traverse and saw one of the D's dragging himself painfully out of the trench. Here was a companion in retreat. He had the use of one leg, and at first we hopped in step as in a sack-race, he leaning on my shoulder. Then his leg gave out with pain, and I thought of the time-honoured device by which one's duty to one's neighbour and the care of one's own person, as so seldom happens, are made to coincide. I put him on my back. With this shield and buckler covering every vulnerable part of my carcass I hobbled into the asylum of a field ambulance.

I soon found the Brigade Headquarters. We had got into the Turkish trenches, the general told me; but by that time our line was too thin, the supports were late in coming up, and we had been bombed out. Things were as they were. At noon the rain came down. All day and all night it poured, putting the crown upon dejection. One thought of the wounded shivering in the cold and mud between the lines, waiting for the night and the slow miserable train of gridiron-bottomed carts.

I met very few who had been in the Turkish trenches; few came out. There was one boy, the only officer of the Black Watch who came out of it alive and unwounded, and he had a bullet in his pocket and another in his hat. He was full of the story, told it with a naive simplicity, a kind of bated wonder at being alive. The faculty of

wonder is not very elastic. The biggest things in history make a breakfast-table yarn the next morning not much bigger than the tale of a fall from a horse, and as the boy talked we interrupted him, and asked about mails, and whether there was a field canteen coming up from Ali Gharbi.

It was a miracle that anyone had lived through that fire in the attack and the retirement, but the boy and his men had been in the Turkish first line trench an hour and a quarter. Fragments of other regiments had got through. I saw their dead carried out during the truce the next day. The boy had seen a subaltern of the D's and four men step quietly over the parapet, but the trench was empty of the enemy then. His own men had been in first. The adjutant was hit in the head as he stood up to give the order for the last rush; a corporal ran to his side and fell beside him. Neither was seen to move.

"Our men were falling all round," the boy said. "I saw eight rifles and bayonets all pointing at me, and the men's faces. I was awful scared. I expected to go down in the next ten yards. I felt the lead in my stomach; it was hot round my ear. I thought I was done in."

"Why didn't they fire?"

"I don't know. I suppose they were scared. I let off my revolver at them, and it kicked up a lot of dust."

"Was that when you got the bullet through your helmet?"

"Oh, no! That was before." He took off his topee and showed me how it had grazed his hair.

"Through your pocket?"

"That was after."

"I see you have had one in your boot."

"That was on the 7th."

Most of our frontal fire came from the second line. Our concentrated bombardment on the trenches nearest

the river had thinned the Turks in the front line here. They knew where to expect our attack and had moved along towards the left and the marsh, whence they enfiladed our advance into the bombarded zone. Much of the frontal fire from their second-line trenches went high, and this would explain the number of casualties at long range during the barrage, where our trenches became so choked with wounded that there was no cover for the supports as they came up.

The bombardment, it will be seen, had little effect on the Turk save to indicate our point of attack, and the boy incurred a certain amount of unpopularity in high quarters when asked to contribute evidence of its severity. He replied simply to the questions put to him that the trenches he had seen were not much damaged, and the wire, such as it was, was uncut. This did not please the Staff, but a Turkish officer from Gallipoli, whom we spoke to during the truce the next day, bore him out. He smiled at the idea of being frightened out by "that dust and smoke." He had seen bombardments in the Dardanelles. "Oh, no, we do not mind your bombardments," he said; "when you shell our front line trenches we lie low and fire from the second line; and when you shell our second line, we get up again and fire from the first."

The boy cleared a redoubt fifty yards in front of the line. The Turks dropped their rifles and ran. Once inside the trench he lost all count of time. "It might have been half an hour; it might have been three hours and a half," he said. As a matter of fact it was an hour and a quarter. The trench was soon empty and he was "as safe in it as in a house." He found a machine gun and turned it on the second line, and over the traverse into the Turkish left. The machine was a difficult pattern; it jammed every six or seven shots. He took out the feed, cut the belt, ejected the cartridges, shoved the belt

in again, and played with the thing like a toy, till the Turks came bombing down the line right on to his traverse, when he put five shots into the maxim and cleared. The Black Watch had no bombs, and they were gradually driven down the trench from traverse to traverse towards the river, where another bombing party was coming up a communication trench at right angles. The Black Watch were jammed in densely between these attacks and literally squeezed over the parapet. As they evacuated the trench they came under a deadly fire and lost more than in the attack. They had one piece of luck. A company had lost their way the night before and dug in fifty yards nearer the enemy than the rest of the regiment; they came on this forward trench in their retreat and it saved them fifty yards of fire and many lives. They held this trench and the redoubt till night, when they were able to get their wounded away without further loss.

Scout-Sergeant MacDonald stayed in the trench until the last man of the Black Watch had left, covering the traverse with his rifle. This gallant soldier—"he was the bravest man I ever knew," the colonel told me many days before—was the last of his regiment to fall. He was hit just as he was slipping back into the trench. B., too, a subaltern friend of the boy's, was hit in the back of the head by a bullet in the same way just as he was slipping down into cover. The boy described the scene with some details which I cannot repeat.

"That affected me more than anything else," he concluded modestly. "I suffered from a nervous collapse."

I could not help smiling at the "nervous collapse," knowing how he had played up all the rest of the day.

He told me of a dream B. had had on the night of the 20th. He had seen an aureole of women's faces round the moon. At first he thought they were angels,

then they were chorus girls, and they were all laughing and beckoning him towards Kut-el-Amara. This dream he related in the early morning before the attack as one of good omen.

On a night before an action one has solemn dreams. I have seen an ominous sky showing rents in its blanket of cloud, torn by shell-fire. A friend told me that the night before Sheikh Saad he dreamt of his mother. It was the second time in his life that he had dreamt of her, and the same vivid, realistic dream. The first time he had been dangerously ill and his life was despaired of. This time, too, he came through by a miracle.

"I suppose you command the regiment," I said to the boy. He had just turned 20. But there was another subaltern just turned 21, who, being Regimental Transport Officer at the time, had not been in the fight. He was senior to the boy, and the command fell on him.

The Black Watch had gone in 120 strong and came out fifty—twenty-five wounded, twenty-five sound. Sixty others, including the machine-gun section, who had not attacked, survived. Three other officers besides the boy came out alive, all badly wounded. This for the time being was the end of one of the finest battalions in the British Army; and one asked, though the question was never asked by themselves, why a regiment so depleted, reduced to a fifth of its effectives in three engagements within fourteen days, was given the post of honour in the brunt of the attack.

The supports came up too late. Otherwise it was believed the captured trenches might have been held, though it seems sanguine to have hoped that the position would fall to the attack of the weak brigade which had been so heavily punished during the two previous weeks. There were the Black Watch (left) and the 41st Dogras (right) entrenched 250 yards from the enemy, and the 6th Jats and 37th Dogras 150 yards behind the Black Watch

and 41st respectively; and behind these at a thousand yards from the Turks the 97th Infantry (left) and the Buffs (right). The strength of the whole brigade, including the two lent regiments, was a thousand rifles.[1] The 9th Brigade was in support of the 35th, the 19th on the right with orders to advance if the position were carried.

The extreme distance which the supports had to cover under heavy fire made the chances of the attacking party more slender. Once more the gallant regiments who made the assault were called upon to illustrate the cost of throwing troops into the attack in detail instead of massing them in force. It seems that the leading regiment lost direction. They were confused by the bend of the river, and had lost nearly all their officers, British and Indian. When they came up they found themselves too far to the right in the direction of the marsh, where the Turkish trenches were unbroken, and so failed to lend any impetus to our attack on the left. Other regiments followed, repeating the mistake.

A small batch of the Hants were seen to advance at a walking pace some 1,800 yards without taking any cover. At 400 yards from the enemy one officer and two men were left. They walked coolly on and were within 300 yards of the Turkish trenches when the officer, the last of that forlornest of forlorn hopes, fell. Nothing could have been more gloriously perverse. It was a kind of vicarious expiation. They must have been moved by an obscure sense that somebody ought to make good, and in a spirit of devotion they took upon themselves the full chastisement. It was wrong-headed—but their utmost. The moral of the incident is its reflection upon the command. The supports should have been ready to rush in the moment the trenches were taken.

[1] This thousand included the remnants of the Black Watch, 6th Jats, and 41st Dogras, which had been attached to the brigade for the action. The 102nd Grenadiers, one of the regular battalions of the brigade, were with the 19th Brigade, and did not take part in the attack.

When I next dined with the Black Watch there was room for us all in an 80-lb. tent. There was the O.C. temporarily attached, the padre, the boy, the doctor, and the quartermaster. The doctor, Duncan, "who did not care a damn for shell-fire," was killed when attached to the Leicesters during the attack on the Sinn position on March 8th. In the meanwhile the Black Watch and Seaforths were amalgamated, and made up a thin battalion at that, in spite of the new drafts. In the same way the remnants of other battalions had been telescoped together.

I have described the action in one part of the front, the part where our attack was driven in. With the Black Watch there were officers and men of the 6th Jats, 97th Infantry, 37th Dogras, 41st Dogras and a handful of the Hants.[1] I saw a sepoy of the 62nd Punjabis carried out of the Turkish trenches on the 22nd. No doubt others broke through of whom nothing will be heard. The stubborn gallantry of the attack may be read in the casualty list. The 35th Brigade went in 1,000 strong and came out 550. They had lost 1,045 at Sheikh Saad, fifty at the Wadi. Not a single field officer was left in the brigade, and two regiments were commanded by second lieutenants in the Indian Reserve.

And it was with this broken force, numbed, soaked and shivering in the rain, that a second attack was ordered on the enemy's position at one o'clock. Happily it never seriously developed.

[1] The following is an extract from a report of the operations issued by General Younghusband for communication to all British and Indian ranks concerned: "I cannot speak too highly of the splendid gallantry of the Black Watch, aided by parties of officers and men of the 6th Jats, 97th Infantry, and 41st Dogras, in storming and occupying the enemy's trenches. Their advance had to be made across a perfectly open bullet-swept area against sunken loop-holed trenches in broad daylight, and their noble achievement is one of the highest." The great and most admirable gallantry of all ranks, and especially that of the British officers, is worthy of the highest commendation. They showed the finest qualities of endurance and courage under circumstances so adverse as to be almost phenomenal.

CHAPTER IX

THE NIGHT OF JANUARY 21ST

THE scandal of Sheikh Saad and the Wadi was repeated on the night of the 21st, and the misery of the wounded was aggravated by the rain and the cold. Two sections only of one of the five divisional ambulances had arrived at Orah. Happy and few were the cases the stretcher-bearers could attend to, and fortunate the men who fell early in the day far enough from the firing-line to be removed while it was still light. Before noon the rain had settled into a steady downpour, the plain had become a lake of mud, and the wounded lay in pools ankle-deep. In France there were cases of men who were left out between the trenches for days to die in the frost or rain. They must have plumbed the depths of human agony, but for collective misery the night of the 21st is probably unparalleled since the Crimea in the history of sufferings endured by the British Army.

Tents had been put up in the camp, but on ground in which one sank over one's boots in mire. Into these standing pools of gluey mud, men exhausted with cold and pain and loss of blood were carried from the carts and deposited in the dark. Every now and then the flicker of a lamp would come with promise of help, and then stop. Hospital assistants were going their rounds, doing what they could, trying to strike damp matches, to make wet dry. Doctors were somewhere, but could not be everywhere at once. They did not spare themselves, and it was no fault of theirs that the stream that poured in was something with which they could not cope.

Fatigue parties with axe and shovel were cutting down to drier ground, but the earth was porous and straw and blankets were scanty.

We met the wounded as they came in on the carts, and carried them out tea and rum from the ships. Some of the forms were voiceless, dead or too far gone to speak; the cold and damp had its grip on them, and then their hold on life was shaken by the jolting of the carts. Some cried on Allah, some on God, but most of the British were stoical. "I can't get at it, sir; will you pour it into my mouth?" It was a Connaught Ranger. "Oh, begorrah, you have saved my life!" and the big man sobbed like a child.

The Indians did not understand the change of conditions after France. There everything was done; here, it seemed, nothing. It was as if the Sirkar had forgotten them. To hear them imploring straw and blankets and food or crying out that they were lying in water was pitiful. Straw and blankets came, and even food, but long hours of misery were endured first. By eight o'clock half a shipload of blankets and quilts was being issued. All the blankets of the Black Watch—but few of the regiment would sleep in them again—all the tents of the Hampshires were at the service of the wounded. Everybody lent a hand, and all through the night the carts came in.

In one of the tents I found eleven men of whom only one answered to the call of "Rum;" the others were mercifully numbed into unconsciousness. A Hampshire man in the corner asked me to take off his boots; propped up, he could swallow the rum. His *vis-à-vis* was being shaken by some dreadful paroxysm in his struggle for breath. In the lamplight it was difficult to distinguish from their faces whether they were Indian or English; all had the same stark grey look, the ashen bloodless hue we saw in the faces of the dead the next morning. I

returned to the ship for more blankets. They were sodden before we got them to the tents, but there was warmth in the weight of them. When we came back, some of the eleven had wakened up to this new phase; that efforts were being made to relieve them. It was worth while now stretching an arm or lifting a hand, and blankets were drawn over or pulled under men who were too far gone to help themselves. But as I poured rum, which smelt of paraffin, down the throat of the Hampshire man I heard the death rattle in the straw opposite. There were only ten in the tent now. Such misery could not befall our *vis-à-vis* again.

We had carried many straight from the carts on to the ship, where they lay covering every inch of the deck. Then we began clearing the tents of such as we could move. Some were left out in the rain on the transport carts all night; it was better than the mud. Only by the engine and the lascars' cooking-stove—a forge-like brazier—was there any warm place; and here the wounded, who could stand up, made a ring, their teeth chattering, their heads jerking on their necks with ague, faces bespattered with blood and mud, some joking in spite of it all, with the red glare in their faces, cigarettes between their teeth—like a group of the damned trying to make merry in hell. I heard a subaltern say, by way of comfort, searching vainly for some adequate greeting in this grimly impressive scene: "I suppose this is as near hell as we are likely to see, Sergeant O'Malley."

Sergeant O'Malley drew himself up stiffly and answered in his disciplined, matter-of-fact way, as if he had been asked whether the quarter-guard had turned out, "I should say it was, sir."

The buzz of wretchedness on the ship was broken by the bark of a gun far away in the dark and the rain. It came as a shock to think that the shambles we were clearing up, these countless remnants of men that could never

MUD.

be mended, were not sacrifice enough to the ideal for which we were fighting. Without thinking of it we were fighting with an instinctive sense of cleaning up and making an end. The Turks were, no doubt, in the same pass as ourselves. None of us felt any hatred for them; probably they none for us. Yet the spirit, not of wrath but of madness, was insatiable, and all mankind was engulfed. Mere death is faced bravely by the most timid every day; but the thing that was most difficult to understand at the moment was how any who had seen the misery of this night could go resolutely into the attack again.

For the spiritual and material cost of this wastage cannot be counted in the dead who might have lived, in the maimed who might have had the use of their limbs; the ultimate reckoning was to be paid in the blow dealt to the spirit of the living, who were becoming inured to this order of things.

The journey of long hours in the transport carts, often ankle-deep in mud, might have exhausted a healthy and able-bodied man. The *drabies* who brought the wounded in were stiff as mummies, sodden, speechless, petrified with cold. They made journey after journey without food or warmth, coaxing and beating their mules through the inexorable mud. They care nothing for bullets or shells or measurable fatigue, but that night the limits of endurance were reached. Afterwards one heard hard things of the *drabi;* for so docile is he and inexpressive of himself that he had come to be regarded as a mere automaton, with none of the limitations of the human machine. When he failed, there was small leaven of pity in Tommy's anger at his collapse. Oaths are his heritage. An agonised voice issues from the cart:

"Go on, go on, son of a pig, would you leave me here to die?"

But the patient *drabi* lets the reins slip and stumbles

down into the mud. He will survive, no doubt, and receive punishment; but for the moment he has given all he has to give.

Some of the wounded were left out all night. Many must have died who might have lived if they could have been attended to. A Highlander was found lying over the parapet, his face the colour of blue chalk; shot through the loin, he had bled to death. Others died of exposure and exhaustion without wounds. In one case not only the wounded man on the stretcher, but the bearers bringing him in succumbed. A voice was heard in the dark crying out, "For God's sake help me out of this. I am drowning." The doctor went to the spot and found a soldier with his leg shattered by a shell; he drew him gently out of the pool. It was easy to drown that night, if one lost consciousness. In the morning stretchers were found abandoned in the mud with their limp dead in them. The little *Aerial* brought in more survivors on the 22nd. The adjutant of an Indian regiment, wounded early on the 21st, had been lying in the mud till noon of the 22nd, a bullet through his lungs —no dressing, no overcoat; he was completely numbed, had lost the use of both legs from exposure, and begged for a warm place by the boiler. A colonel was carried on board with his arm broken, paralysed with cold; after an hour by the stove he walked.

Nearly every boat on the river took cartloads of wounded downstream, huddled on the bare decks without cover from the rain. As the casualties increased after Sheikh Saad the misery became cumulative. Lint, gauze, dressings, splints ran short. There were not enough doctors to go round, no one to cook the food or distribute it. Sufferings were increased by cold, hunger, thirst, dirt, exposure, and the hopelessness of neglect. I did not see the horrors of these ships after they were loaded, but we heard tales of the men arriving at Amara

unfed, untended, with bedsores, some in a dying state, their first field dressings eight days old unchanged, maggots in the wounds, gangrene, filth indescribable, abominations too revolting for print.

I was with a friend in an Indian Frontier regiment when he received a wire from Amara telling him that two of his native officers had arrived dead. "My God!" he said, "these fellows were my pals. I have been shooting with them, lived in their villages, eaten their chickens, drunk their milk. When I had enteric, Muhammed Ali looked after me like a nurse. Can't you do anything?"

I had cabled to India and home appealing for medical "comforts"—not "necessities"—for the troops, but this damning admission of need, I learnt afterwards, was suppressed by the Censor.

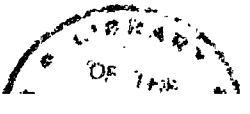
The wounded, who made the voyage in the boats, were very weary. I heard of an officer, who, when he reached the hospital at Amara, said to his devoted orderly: "Muhammed Khan, in a few hours I shall die, and the hospital orderlies will come to carry me away, but do not let them take me. I wish to lie here a little while in peace. I am very tired. See to it that my body rests here the whole day and all night."

He shut his eyes and his last moments were a foretaste of the great Peace, as the dark shadows closed in screening off all pitiful effort, and he knew that he would never have to lift a hand again.

And Muhammed Khan sat with his master weeping until the bearers came with their stretcher in the morning.

This little story, more than any statistics, brings home the unutterable weariness of those days. And with it I shall end my account of wounds and sufferings. Before the next engagement the ambulances arrived, the medical equipment was complete, and the wounded endured only such sufferings as are inevitable and common to all war. Somebody described El Hannah as a twentieth century

battle with eighteenth century medical arrangements, and the full story of that tragic night should be told. It is a history over which no gloss should be thrown, for if there is one subject which needs to be treated in its naked truth it is war. The more vividly these scenes are pictured the less likely are they to be repeated. For they serve to show that the most cruel sacrifice which war can demand is to ask men to face the modern machinery of destruction without the resources of alleviation which modern science can provide.



CHAPTER X

THE TRUCE

RAIN fell in torrents all night. The heavens came down and threatened to put an end to all strife in a general inundation. The river was brimful, our camps were under water, the only dry place was the hold of a ship. The enemy in front of General Townshend's position at Kut had to abandon their trenches and retire two thousand yards. The besieged were in little better plight; for our trenches were flooded too. In sections of the first line our men were standing waist deep in water at ice temperature. There were many cases of frost-bite; and some of the Indians who were brought in, in a state of collapse from the cold, succumbed. We were encamped on the scene of the Great Flood, and it really seemed as if that Biblical visitation were going to repeat itself, engulfing Turk and infidel alike.

The next morning, January 22nd, the day of the truce, it still poured, but in the afternoon the rain had degenerated into a drizzle which an icy wind drove into the skin. It had been an appalling night. Strong men were found dead of exposure without a wound. Barely a shot had been fired after dark; on both sides all physical resources were taxed to their utmost to withstand the damp and cold. The four-mile walk from camp to the no-man's land where the truce was observed took an able-bodied man two hours and a half; one had to coax one's boots out of the gluey mud at every step, and the plain was strewn with wheels and wreckage of war.

The truce was an opportunity of seeing the Turk. All this time he had been as invisible as the Hun in

Flanders, lying very snug in his ditch just under the thin mole scratchings we could see from our front trenches. We teased him sometimes with maxims, and plumped an occasional shell over him, but seldom drew his fire except when we attacked. At Sheikh Saad and the Wadi he had left his position at night.

When I reached the place of parley our Staff officers had gone, and the discussion as to the handing over and burying of the dead was being carried on by the officers of the regiment who happened to be entrenched by the white flag. The clothes of the men were sodden, their teeth were chattering, they were shaking with ague and covered with mud. A penetrating wind was getting up. At any ordinary time these men would have been in hospital. One pitied them their night in the trenches.

The Turkish officers looked warm and comfortable, and, as my friend said, they were "most damnably polite." They have good manners. An officer in an astrakhan cap riding an Arab stallion looked as if he had not turned a hair. Probably they had not been fighting, but had come up from their tents and were chosen for deputies to give us a sense of their well-being.

"I hear you are in tents," I said to one of them. He smiled blandly.

"How can we have tents," he said, "when you have these grand bombardments?" There was irony in that. We had rent the heavens with our artillery, but, I believe, done little harm.

"How long do you think the war will last?" he asked me.

"Possibly five years," I said carelessly.

"Five years; never mind. It is of no consequence." And he smiled to imply that the Turks took these things lightly. I asked him if this was a typical Mesopotamian winter.

"You feel the cold?" he said. "Ah, nó, it is not so cold. It is passable."

He was acting a part, but I began to wish that we had warmer men for this parley. My neighbour was shaking with cold. In the morning he had wandered unarmed over the ground between the two white flags and had been set upon and had his arm nearly broken by a shovel. I believe a Turkish officer intervened. He escaped with his clothes. Wrist-watch and rupees he could spare, but he grudged them his spectacles. "No good to the infernal blackguards," he said, "and it will be three months before I can get any more."

A subaltern, also unarmed, felt himself clutched at from behind and pawed all over. They fingered his waist, feeling for a purse belt, took his watch and field-glasses, even his private letters, and robbed him of everything he had, except the clothes he stood up in. They would have stripped him bare if it had not been for two of his own men who came up in the nick of time and sent them flying.

It is only fair to the Turks to explain that these were Arabs—whether Arab regulars or irresponsible nomads is not clear. The Arab regular in the Turkish army is the same unregenerate Arab under the leash. Apart from the whip, the Turkish officer, he is the hound out for blood. One of our dead, while being brought over, came to life again. This was too much for the Arabs, who had carried him two hundred yards. They knocked him on the head and stripped him. I was told this by an Irish soldier who saw it, and it is probably true. One could see that the bodies they were bringing over had been stripped: the clothes were carelessly thrown over them; a Highlander had his waistcoat and kilt; a Sikh with his long hair uncoiled had only a shirt; a single uniform did duty for three. These strong, slow-moving casual men carried the corpses slung over their shoulders like sacks of coal

or trusses of hay. They dumped them on the ground, where they lay stiffened in the postures in which they had fallen—some in the gallant attitude of attack, others with their arms folded under them, shot through the head or the heart; men whose spirit, now quit of the suffering flesh, had driven them a few hours before in twos and threes over the bullet-swept plain to an almost certain death.

The Turks were ashamed of this jackal work, whoever was responsible for it. There were bodies they could not bring back. They had buried them in their own lines and held a service over them, the Turkish officer told me, explaining that it was a ceremony of respect in which there were no prescribed rites, Christian or Moslem. One rite only we suspected—that they had gone stark into the bosom of Mother Earth, naked as she had borne them.

These Tigris Arabs are a lower type than the Bedouin. They have no virtue. No germ of decency has begun to sprout in them. They are frankly plunderers, and murder is merely the preliminary to pillage. They kill their prey before they strip it. A battlefield is haunted by them for days. They leave the dead stark. Yet to see their prisoners clamouring for food and water and attention to the wounded you would think they had been trained in the comity of nations. It is on record that they have sometimes spared the wounded, but only on occasions when some responsible person has been by—an influential Sheikh or a regular Turkish officer.

While I was talking to the Turkish officer an orderly came up and held his hand at the salute until we had finished our conversation. I was wondering whether the men who looted our officers were Arabs in the regular army or local tribesmen hanging on the skirts of it, for these battalions wear no uniform or distinguishing badge. The discipline and respect shown by the orderly made me

feel more certain that it was the hangers-on who had broken the truce, and I had no reason to disbelieve the Turk's story about the ceremony over our dead.

Nominally the Arabs were fighting for the Turks, but they are the most uncomfortable allies. Their Islamic sympathies are but skin-deep, and they turn on their friends and murder and loot them if opportunity delivers them into their hands. The Turks use them, but put no trust in them. They are a fluctuating quantity. A sheikh and his tribe will join the Turks, become discontented in a week through shortness of rations or some other passing cause, bring his complaint in the night, and be off in the morning. The Arab is out for loot, and follows no cause. For the Turk he has no love, though it is natural that the accident of a common creed should count a little in his wavering predilections. But there is not a tribe in Mesopotamia that has not been in a state of rebellion at some time against Ottoman rule. That good sportsman Saif Ullah, once commandant of the pompier brigade at Constantinople, expressed our mutual case against the Arab when he became our prisoner at Amara. "It would be better," he said, "if we could join hands and make an end of these scavengers. We could settle our own differences later."

It was Saif Ullah who, knowing the methods of the country and the avarice of the Arab, offered a reward of five lira for every prisoner brought in, a slightly higher sum than the pilferings of a corpse were likely to yield.

The Turk has a contempt for the fighting qualities of the Arab. Later, in May, when we were negotiating with Khalil Bey, he refused to accept Arabs in exchange for British or Indian prisoners of war. "They are cowards and runaways," he said. "What should I do with them? I could only shoot them if you did send them back. Why did they surrender? The Turkish soldier only surrenders when he has shot his last cartridge

and cannot kill any more. These Arabs yielded, not for the one reason which justifies surrender, but only out of cowardice, to save their own skins." In contrast he praised the courage of the Turk. Personal bravery is a common theme in the Ottoman army. They are not shy of discussing it, as we are, who take it as a matter of course. With them it is uplifted and brought forward. "I will tell you what an officer of ours did," he said proudly. "Shot in the throat and unable to speak, he made a sign for a paper and pencil in the manner of a man who makes his last testament. 'For myself I am dying,' he wrote, 'but I look to my gallant company to avenge my death.'"

Without being led into an unconsidered eulogy of the Turk, who has his faults like everybody else, I think it will be allowed that in courtesy and chivalry he is immeasurably superior to the Hun. He does not fire intentionally on the Red Cross, nor is he in the habit of shooting stretcher-bearers and the wounded. There are isolated instances, as in all campaigns, but in most cases where Germans and Arabs were not responsible it was probably accidental. The Turks are courteous people to deal with. When two of our airmen fell into their hands the Turkish General, Nur-ud-Din, sent an Arab into our camp, at their request, asking us to send over their kits. The Political handed over the men's belongings and some money for purchases, but the prisoners had gone north when the messenger arrived, whereupon Nur-ud-Din sent the kit and the money back, with his regrets and a courteous message that the airmen were his guests and would be in no need.

We were gathering all our resources for the destruction of the Turk, but we bore him no resentment, and on the whole I think he nourished no very deep-rooted malice towards us. I asked the officer in the astrakhan cap why they had come in against us. He did not seem quite

clear about it, said that we had not helped them in the Balkan War, and mumbled something I could not catch about politics.

At half-past five the rain ceased and the sun dropped into the clear belt of sky that rimmed the horizon. After a day without a gleam of colour a yellow haze spread across the plain, a flood of golden light was thrown upon the faces of the dead like a message of peace, and gilded an outlying flank of the Pusht-i-Kuh. Half an hour afterwards the truce ended. But it was continued in spirit, there was no more rifle or gun fire that night.

All our impressions of the afternoon aggravated our sense of the futile wastage of war. We wished that we were killing Germans, the real menace to civilisation, and not these dupes, Arabs and Turks, whom they had drawn round them in a double coil of protection.

CHAPTER XI

WITH THE CAVALRY—THE ADVANCE ON THE RIGHT BANK

On January 27th it opened fine. Until February 8th we had a succession of clear cold days with icy winds drying up the mud, and frost at nights. The three actions of January 7th, 13th and 21st had crippled the 7th Division on the left bank. Things had degenerated into a state of siege warfare, and we were gradually sapping up to the Turkish position at El Hannah. News came through that Townshend had found fresh supplies in Kut, and could hold out till March. The advance was indefinitely postponed till the arrival of reinforcements.

On the right bank the cavalry and sappers were busy reconnoitring and surveying. Nothing was doing on the left bank, so I pitched my camp with the 3rd Division across the river. I saw a great deal of the cavalry during this lull in the operations. A reconnaissance was always a change after the monotony of camp, though a year or more of this kind of thing, often with little variety of incident, had begun to pall on the cavalryman. Day after day the same manœuvre repeats itself. At a horizon's bound from the camp the "Buddoo" appears out of vacancy. At two thousand yards or more his bullets spatter the mud. In the meanwhile a troop has been sent off to the flank. They dismount and fire; if this does not scatter them, we dismount the machine-gun and the Arabs streak away into the mirage. In half an hour they reappear; out goes the troop again. It is like a minuet, this approaching and firing and receding. Often they manœuvre on both flanks. In the evening when we turn back to camp they press in closer, extended

right across the horizon like a line of poplars in the mirage.

When we have the horse artillery with us they are even less bold. Their scouts soon mark the observation ladder, or "the pulpit" as we call it, employing a simile which is doubly apt. For the gunner in this high eminence is ecclesiastical in attitude if not in language; and from him proceeds the only exhortation that the "Buddoo" understands.

The mobility of the Arab cavalry, who ride light and are unsparing of their horses, is something beyond experience. On approaching a Turkish position to reconnoitre during an engagement our scouts will often see a horde of Arabs emerge from the dark masses and spread in a fanlike movement over the whole horizon. These irregulars are eternally swooping about, for no apparent reason, unless it be bravado or the instinct of the kite, in complicated movements and figures of eight. Drop a shell in front of them, and they will swerve like a flight of teal, make a wide detour at full gallop, and appear on the other flank.

The atmosphere is most deceptive, and in the haze or mirage it is difficult to tell if the enemy are horse or foot, or to make any estimate of their numbers. Everything is magnified. A low-lying mud village becomes a fort with walls 20 ft. high, a group of donkeys a palm grove. Camels appear on a near horizon like huge dissipated compasses. There is not a cavalry regiment with the Force which has not at some time or other mistaken sheep for infantry. All that is gained in scouting by the flatness of the country is discounted by the eccentricities of the mirage. Often in a reconnaissance the enemy are within 600 yards before the squadron commander can distinguish whether they are mounted or on foot.

Apart from the mirage, the country affords little or no cover, save the mud banks of an occasional dry irriga-

tion channel. These are high, and in the distance might be taken for the walls of a city. The disused water channels look as if the canal had been carried above the level of the surrounding country. The low isolated sand-hill is a snare which draws artillery fire and leaves an exposed flank on either side.

In no theatre of the war is our cavalry so essential, for the Arabs make up a kind of irregular arm for the Turk. They are always hovering on our flank ready to take advantage of any accident or confusion by the way. And they follow like jackals in our rear. Two jibbing ponies in a Jaipur transport cart have to be unyoked and the cart abandoned. The Arabs are down on it before the rear-guard has passed on 800 yards. After this the nondescript herd closes in, emboldened by the loot.

The impudence of the Arab is sometimes entertaining. At Ali Gharbi I saw a motley rabble of unarmed villagers, old men and boys, attempt to pilfer a limber wagon as it was leaving camp, and a sowar scatter them to the four winds by gentle prods with his lance.

The day after Sheikh Saad a chaplain rides up to the colonel of an Indian Lancer regiment with whom I am talking and asks for an escort to a battlefield three miles in the rear to bury the dead. "Three sowars will be enough, sir," the padre says apologetically; "I wouldn't trouble you, but it is orders." The colonel has been in the country fourteen months. He sends out a British officer and two troops. It is only three miles out from Army Headquarters, yet two gunner officers had nearly been scuppered the day before while inspecting an abandoned trench.

The Arabs, of course, melt away whenever our cavalry charge. We can never get in among them. They are light and carry little kit, and seem to be independent of supplies. Their horses look thin and poor, but are hard and well fed, and they do not mind using them up.

Our chargers are handicapped with their six stone of accoutrement, rifle and sword and ammunition, water-bottle, cloak, two blankets, emergency rations, a day's grain for the horse, and generally a heavier man to carry. The Arab horseman has his bag of dates, a small ration of grain for his horse, and nothing else save his arms and ammunition. These are of no regular pattern—a rifle always, Martini-Henry or Mauser, a dagger or sword, or both, waist belt, and bandolier of ammunition, and occasionally, especially among the Muntafiks, a lance—a broad-headed, formidable spear like an assegai.

A year's campaigning taught the "Buddoo" a great deal. At first he seldom fired except from the saddle; when he dismounted he fired kneeling or standing up. He would salute you with a salvo at 3,000 yards or more, as the Chinaman is said to beat his gong, or the orang-outang his breast, to intimidate the foe or put heart into himself. Afterwards he became an adept at taking cover; he dismounted and lay down to fire, and knew how to lie up in a nullah or a patch of scrub. Whether he learnt these tactics from us or from the Turk is a doubtful point; possibly the Turk was training him, though the "Buddoo" does not lend himself easily to discipline.

They have not adopted the led-horse system. I am told, though this may not be general, that the Bedou ponies will stand and wait for their riders. They are very docile and confidential, and will come into their masters' tents and sometimes even let him stand up in the saddle, a valuable vantage for scouts. The tactics of the "Buddoos" are always to surround a smaller force, shoot the horses and close in, or to lead our cavalry on to an infantry ambuscade. They fear ambuscade themselves, and are chary of following us up. They are naturally more formidable in a retirement, when they wait until our cavalry are mounting and get in their fire before

they take up another position. They will only attack small bodies when the odds are five or six to one. They cut up a patrol or two, but have never got in on a troop or squadron, much less on a regiment, and are not encouraged by their superior numbers, which are indeed discounted by our guns.

A skirmish at Barjisiyeh Wood, near Shaiba, in March, 1915, was, I think, the only occasion on which they have charged. They believed they had taken us in an ambuscade and at a disadvantage in the deep mud. We were 450 cavalry with two sections of horse artillery, and vastly outnumbered. We had no time to close in ranks and crumple them up, but wheeled on to them in extended order. We were interlocked. For a minute it was sword and lance. Then they gave. As they retired they came under our infantry fire, which did bloody execution. It was the best fight they had put up.

Nevertheless, our daily reconnaissances take their toll. A dropping bullet makes as big a hole as a bullet at close quarters, and there is generally a casualty or two among horses or men. Then, perhaps, after uneventful days there will come a hot little scrap in a nullah or among the sandhills. A major in the 7th Hariana Lancers split one Arab with his sword and shot another with a revolver in the same patrol, and his men accounted for three more. He had only five troopers with him when he charged, but the "Buddoos" were twelve. A trooper on the flank had dropped a horse. The sowar mounted behind another trooper; their horse in turn was hit, and the two men were footing it towards the squadron as best they could, hanging on to their comrades' stirrups, with the Arabs in pursuit. It was just the kind of emergency for which the Arab bides his time.

The nullah was broad and deep, with a bend in it, and the major with his five men were just dismounting to fire on the pursuers when, seeing they were only

twelve, he gave the order to mount and charge. The Arabs sighted him as he came round the bend at two hundred yards. Even then they did not believe that he would charge. At a hundred yards they wheeled and turned, but too late. Our men were well mounted and had the legs of them. The major brought down one with the fifth shot from his revolver; the sowars prodded three others with their lances. Then followed the pursuit of "the gentleman in the blue coat."

As the major pursued, the Arab turned in his saddle and took steady aim at him with his rifle over his left shoulder; he swung his horse to the off side of the "Buddoo," who turned in the saddle again and aimed at him point-blank. "I had already tumbled to it," the major explained, "that the rifle wasn't loaded; and as he didn't fire, I became certain." So he dug his spurs in, rode at him, and stuck him from behind, and that was the end of "the gentleman in the blue coat."

The major strained his wrist drawing out his sword. That is always the difficult point. "It went in like butter," a subaltern of horse told me, describing a similar incident at Barjisiyeh Wood. "I didn't know I'd got him, but I was almost pulled off my horse drawing it out." And he told me how the natural instinct for the cut sometimes overbore the tradition that demanded the thrust, and how in the pursuit after a little affair near Shaiba he gave way to the impulse—"wanted to see the fellow's head roll off his neck." He felled him all right, but I gathered that he was disappointed in the spectacular effect. The fellow's head was as hard as a croquet ball, he explained. And ever since he has been faithful to the manual and the thrust.

That was in March, 1915, and the subaltern's regiment had not come to close quarters again until the retirement from Ctesiphon in November, when they surprised the "Buddoo" in a reedy nullah by the river, and

cut up 120 of them as they were disputing the prize of a stranded ship.

It will be gathered that the Tigris Arab is not a sportsman in the much-derided British sense of the word. In his own intertribal affairs honour and the appetite for blood are very easily satisfied. When two or three have fallen the others separate to fight again. They have no taste for these holocausts of ours.

Towards the end of February the "Buddoo" became less and less of an oncoming disposition. It may have been that he had gone home to his crops, or his year's service had expired and he had not "signed on" again, being disappointed in prize-money. More probably the shelling of the Turkish camp, or the example of "the gentleman in the blue coat," had cooled his ardour for a time. We had cleared him out of the nullahs and brushwood which he used to infest; beyond this our reconnaissances were over a flat mud plain. All this land is inundated during many months of the year; between floods it is smooth, cracked mud with grass "as scant as hairs in leprosy." In place of verdure one treads down mussel shells or some dried monster of the marsh. I picked up a mud fish, all head, with cavernous eye-sockets, and it seemed an appropriate product of the soil.

I spent most of my days in February on the left bank with the cavalry or sappers. Often with both, for in this Bedouin-infested country the subaltern surveyor may have to take the field with the best part of a brigade for an escort and a squadron or two of horse; and he seldom comes back without some sort of a scrap.

Surveying would be a dull affair if it were not for the "Buddoo," for the country is devoid of any features. The map when we first encamped here showed nothing more than a wriggly line from the south-east to the north-west, with the names of the local tribes, Bani Lam on one side and Maqasis on the other side of the river.

Nomenclature in a land of flat mud is difficult for the surveyor. There is nothing salient for him to give a name to, no trees or hills, and no buildings save the ruins of mud huts, and *bhoosa* mounds—the oven-like clay structures in which the Arab stores his fodder. So the sketch maps became dotted with "mud huts," "Arab village," "Broken huts," "Two mud walls," until confusion became the mother of invention, and the Old Testament, more especially the book of Genesis, was called in with its none too fanciful associations. We had "The Walls of Jericho," "Eve's Crossing," "Serpent's Corner," "Sodom and Gomorrah." The watch towers in our camp were "Jacob's Ladder" and "The Tower of Babel." Two upright cakes of mud became "Stonehenge"; a single one "Lot's Wife." These excrescences were landmarks for miles, and in the mirage sometimes loomed as large as St. Paul's Cathedral.

This dancing mirage plays one a hundred tricks. My sapper friend put up a direction post for prismatic compass survey, a little mound with a flag on it. When he started back to camp he took down the flag. He had left the mound a mile behind when, looking back, he saw what he thought was an Arab pursuing him. He lay down and covered the figure with his rifle and called to his orderly to do the same. They lay in wait while the Arab still came on at the same rapid stride, his cloak flying in the wind. Whole minutes passed, yet though he never ceased to move he came no nearer. They approached and found it was the little mound, no more than a foot high.

One meets with odd atmospheric effects in the desert by night as well as day. I was out with the cavalry on a raid one night against the village of Said Hashim. It was pitch dark and cloudy, with no moon. One could hardly see a yard ahead. Yet there was a visionary horizon with trees and masts on it as in a har-

bour. Any change in the colour of the ground distorts the appearance of everything. One thinks one is coming on a mountain or a lake; brown seems to rise out of grey; grey to sink away from brown. For a long while I was convinced that I was riding under a high bund, above which I could just see the sky. I turned in towards it to avoid what I thought was water, and found that what I had taken for a six-foot bank was the contracted plain between me and the horizon.

The ground was soft after the rain, and our two squadrons made so little noise that they could not be heard at a hundred yards; they could not be seen at twenty. Before dawn we halted. Light came very slowly, and we could see no sign of the village, our objective. This village or encampment was itself friendly and we had no quarrel with it, but we had reason to suspect that hostile tribesmen were abusing the hospitality of the Sheikh. So the infantry had gone out of camp at 4.15; and daylight was to disclose us to them ringing them in with our redoubtable hedge of steel.

When the encampment loomed into sight we found the infantry had already encircled it. The cavalry then cantered in. A zariba of mud and brushwood had become an inner ring—of Arabs. They sat motionless, sedate, staring, wondering what sin they had committed and what all this demonstration could be about. Clearly it could have no end that was not punitive; no doubt they thought that this large force had closed in on them at night to destroy them piecemeal in the morning. Maybe they searched themselves inwardly and were guiltily conscious of broken faith. But they showed no sign of apprehension—none even of interest, but stared fixedly at the horizon, where the bobbing heads of our infantry, peeping up from cover, had drawn this inscrutably ordained noose round them. Or were they laughing at us quietly in their sleeves? I have never discovered.

Degenerate as they may be, and fallen away from the true seed of the Bedouin, unstable, treacherous, and meanly predatory, these villagers have inherited at least one aristocratic instinct common to the East—they do not give away their emotions.

There was always plenty to do in camp. At breakfast someone would ask, "Are we going to attack these people or only strafe them?" A battery supported by two battalions is going out to shell the Beit Aieesa position. Then the general comes up and decides to send the cavalry to draw the Turkish patrols from the Jumailat mounds, to find out in what force they are if that is possible without unduly exposing ourselves, and to decoy them if we can up to an infantry ambuscade on our way back to camp. So breakfast offers two alternatives of spending a quiet day, and in either case one will probably be back to tea.

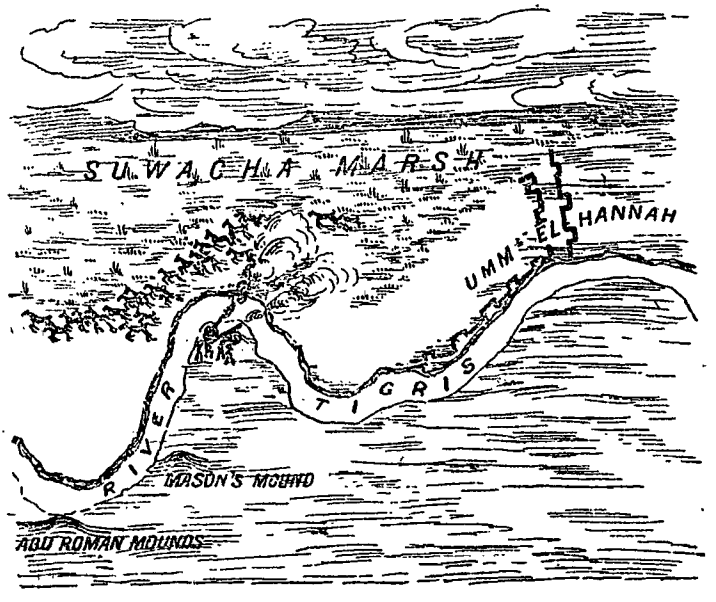
We shell Beit Aieesa, though we are not quite certain if there is anybody in it. We draw out the Turkish patrols from Jumailat, discover there a vague blend of sand and humanity in the mirage, and on the way back come upon our own infantry ambush so skilfully hidden, each man with his head behind a little natural bush, that I for one almost rode on to them unawares. But the Turk is not to be drawn. Those sixty odd pillar-like figures have already halted and are returning. Up goes the pulpit; the horse gunners drop a shell or two among them and they melt into air. Not very effective, but it is one of the canons of war that one must keep the enemy busy, intrigue him, and perplex him as to our plans. In this we were probably entirely successful.

There was satisfaction to be had out of these reconnaissances, and the desert never staled. To be with the cavalry on an illimitable horizon in sight of the enemy's patrols all day, with an occasional gentlemanly little scrap, and the machine-guns strictly on one's own side,

is a pleasant way of spending one's days. One forgets the war and all its miserable train. It is a purging air, and the mirage always keeps the mind at play. The first row of duck I saw by the *jhil*, when we made our circuit of El Braham Lake, I took for a battalion of infantry. Early in the morning the mirage joins things. A troop of Turkish horse looks like a row of trestles with elongated legs. But soon everything is lifted off its feet. Where the troops were, there is a floating table; the legs have disappeared. The camel of an hour ago is a ship suspended in the air. A little mound resembles a burst of shrapnel smoke with a clear streak of horizon under it. However flat and colourless earth may be, there is always food for imagination in the air. These were pleasant days. One even forgot the blight of failure in this open life and exhilarating air. We sedulously kept any faint spark of hope that remained to us. "Of course, we *must* take Kut," was the unanswerable argument. And it was in the worst possible taste to admit any doubt. It was worse than bad taste; it was unpatriotic. For it depressed the regimental officer, on whose confidence so much depended. Still, the means were far to seek.

However, in February we had a chance of dealing the Turk a blow which might have entirely altered the situation. On the left bank our trenches faced the enemy's at El Hannah; but on the right there were no Turkish troops, save patrols and pickets, nearer than Sinn. There was nothing to prevent us taking up a forward position here, had we chosen to do so, twelve miles in advance of the one we held. Only, without the command of the river, this lengthening of the line would have entailed a tax on our land transport which we could not meet. On the other hand, there was an opening for a bold stroke in a surprise attack by which we might effect a crossing behind the El Hannah position, round up the troops which held it, estimated at 6,000, cut off their supplies,

compel their surrender, and thus, with the command of the river, advance on both banks to a new position threatening Sinn. The bend of the river at Abu Roman and Mason's Mounds lent itself perfectly to these operations, for the sandhills commanded the narrow strip between the Tigris and the marsh which the enemy would



have to cross if, finding their rear threatened, they attempted to retire.

This course was presented to the Corps Commander, but it did not commend itself in full; the bold and essential part of it was omitted. It was decided to make the night march, to take up a position on the sandhills in the early morning, and to shell the enemy's camp from the rear. At the same time General Norie's Brigade, the 19th, was to proceed through the marsh on the north bank against the enemy's left. It was very doubtful if there was a passage this way; but it was hoped that the mere presence of a column operating in this direction would have its paralysing effect; that the threatened

pressure on his flank and rear would dislodge the Turk without the dangerous expedient of crossing and attacking him in real earnest. Thus half measures prevailed; operations were tentative, and the chances were thrown away. Dummy pontoons were constructed and ostentatiously removed towards the point where we wished it to be supposed that we intended a crossing. To the very end, and in spite of all experience, the Staff persisted in regarding the Turk as a timid character who might be frightened out of his bolt-hole by a noisy demonstration of force.

The night march of February 21st was a much more dramatic affair than our descent upon Said Hashim, for our objective, a tongue of land lying in a loop of the river, held a hostile Arab encampment. We had to close this in with our troops at dawn and round up any of the enemy we found inside. At the end of this spit, on the river bank, there were mounds standing a full ten feet—a commanding eminence in this flat land—above the surrounding country. From this point of vantage we were going to shell the Turkish camp on the other side of the river as soon as it was light.

It was bright moonlight when we started. We could see figures fifty or sixty yards ahead; at a hundred they were merged in the haze.. It is an anxious business for the sapper who leads the column. He must keep his eye on his compass all the time, and he must count his steps, remembering that his stride is shorter in the dark, and that he will not see a single object the whole night long to serve as a guide or to put him right if he loses the way. He must concentrate his mind on the one thing in hand, and he must not listen to any talk or suggestions; everything depends on his reaching the exact spot at the exact time.

Everything was quiet until we came upon the Arab encampment, when all the dogs in the place gave tongue.

Suddenly, at about a hundred yards there broke out such a blaze of musketry that I thought we had run up against a strong entrenched position. We all threw ourselves flat on the ground and waited events. I had dismounted, and was leading my mare. At such moments one keeps on the leeward side of the best beloved animal in the world. But there was the uncomfortable possibility that there might be no leeward side, for the dark, ill-defined human masses on my left might at any moment become our own firing line, and we were in between. Happily these troops held their fire and did not blaze off at the unseen. The fusillade became sporadic, and then veered off to our right and rear in the direction from which we had come. Our advance guard had run up against a small Turkish cavalry patrol. Realising that retreat was cut off by the river behind them, the Turks had mounted and charged gallantly at our line, firing as they rode. At twenty yards the advance guard opened fire on them, and they swerved like a flight of teal, breaking through our column on their left and leaving half their number on the field. Two of them were brought down by an officer's revolver as they jumped the nullah in which he had taken cover. "It was like shooting driven birds," he said. A Turkish officer left a boot and gilded spur behind, but managed to make good his escape.

All this happened in the half light. Soon the mounds by the bend in the river assumed a definite outline. Our artillery were on the point of coming into action, and we hurried there to see the next act in the play. The Turks were lying snug in their camp on the other side of the Tigris. They could have had no suspicion that we had come up with our guns to take them in the rear. They would naturally have taken the rifle fire which they had heard on our side as a mere affair of outposts.

Their awakening was sudden and dramatic. As the first shells began to fall among their tents there was a

stampede of transport animals. Horses, mules, camels, donkeys, many of them with their nosebags on and no saddles, some mounted, others riderless, began to streak across the plain. From our mounds, which commanded the whole desert like the galleries of a Roman amphitheatre, we could see them emerge and spread out in black lines towards the west. The marsh to the north confined their line of retreat, so that the ever-increasing stream passed within 2,000 yards of us, and our guns played on them with deadly effect. It was a very one-sided affair, and one felt all the while rather like the pampered Roman for whose entertainment the arena was soaked with the blood of men and beasts. There were some jolly little Gurkhas digging in beside us; they did not share these qualms but were hugely amused at the *tamasha*.

We had seen three guns leaving the enemy's camp in the mêlée, and, as we expected, they soon opened fire on our mounds. Their shooting was very straight, but we were already digging ourselves in, and I doubt if our total casualties for the day were more than twenty.

The Turkish losses must have been heavy, as we were firing "into the brown" all the while. Our stalking them at dawn and firing into their camp, and then the panic stampede of these dark hordes, reminded me very much of the disturbance on a *jhil* when one has crept upon a host of unsuspicious wild fowl.

The affair was a successful little *coup* in its small way. Everything went according to plan, except that the Turk lay doggo and would not budge. His transport only had stampeded. But this was a card in our hands we had not foreseen; it meant that the enemy were unable to get their guns up the whole day for an effectual reply. The pity of it was that we had not played the bolder game. With two or three pontoons for flying bridges we could have got a brigade over in a day. The

ferries might have been brought up with us on the night march, and we could have got to work at six in the morning. The country on the opposite bank was clear; we commanded it from our mounds; there was no opposition. If enemy reinforcements had been brought up in the open, it would have been in the face of deadly fire from our maxims and guns. The brigade once across, the 6,000 Turks in the El Hannah position would have been bottled up. With their supplies cut off they could not have held out a week. If they had emerged we should have had them on the flank while the 7th Division, who were entrenched against them, followed up and harassed their rear. In the meanwhile other brigades would have been crossing, and the enemy's only hope would have been a sortie from the Sinn position, which was exactly what we desired. Instead of this, a day of inaction. At night the Turks entrenched themselves all along the river. In the morning they sniped our artillery; a battery had to cut loose their horses and take refuge behind their guns. We were cut off from our water supply by the snipers across the river. The dummy pontoons we had brought up advertised the project of crossing which was not in our minds, while our premature action made the real crossing, which was the vital thing, extremely hazardous, if not impossible. On February 27th real pontoons were sent up from Orah. But it was too late; we had let the golden opportunity slip.

We held Mason's and Abu Roman Mounds, and moved up the 3rd Divisional Headquarters to Thorny Nullah. The next week was spent in grappling with the complicated problem of an advance camp without water.

We had advanced our firing line eight miles on the right bank, but we could not dislodge the Turk at El Hannah by enfilade fire, or extend our river communications. Ahead of us was the Sinn position, bristling and intact, and in no essential thing were we any forwarder.

CHAPTER XII

TRANSPORT

FOR a slow, sure, and deliberate progress a railway following the Euphrates along the Zobeir-Khamisiyeh-Najaf line would have been our easiest road to Baghdad. Our communications would have passed through the richest country in Mesopotamia, and, as we drew nearer Baghdad, through the friendly districts of Najaf and Kerbela, where the most lively hostility is entertained against the Turk. It was this line that the Hun had marked for his descent through Baghdad upon the east.

At the beginning we had no clear vision of Baghdad, but followed a patchwork policy which grew more heady and ambitious as our gallant little force was drawn on. We chose the Tigris as the only possible line of rapid advance. We had to fight the Turk where we found him. Having fought him and routed him, it was right to carry on our thrust while we had him at a disadvantage; but while we were doing so we should have made our communications secure. Everything in Mesopotamia depended on transport. From the first advance from Qurna (May, 1915) to the disastrous thrust at Baghdad, and again, more tragically, in the attempt to relieve Kut, the inadequacy of the river transport weakened or paralysed the striking power of the force. It prevented us following up the Turk after the battle of Kut-el-Amara and destroying his army; it gave him six weeks to prepare and reorganise before our advance from Azizieh, and to throw in the crushing reinforcements that opposed us at Ctesiphon; and it was the main cause of the sur-

render at Kut. Ten thousand infantry and twelve guns were disembarked at Basra when we fought the action at El Hannah, but there were no steamers to carry them to the front. Twelve thousand rifles and twenty-six guns might have been thrown in at Dujaila if we had had the transport available.

Advances were planned, reinforcements were called for; yet the question of getting them to the front and arming and feeding them there seems to have been left out of the account. At one time Simla urged the advance and Whitehall consented; at another time Whitehall was the stimulus. Yet, as our offensive policy developed, there was no corresponding provision for transport, maintenance and supplies. As the force grew, the discharging facilities of the port and the carrying facilities of the river became more and more inadequate to the increased demand. The root of the evil lay in our failure to square our political ends with our means. The supply of ships could not keep pace with the lengthening of our communications which sudden changes in policy decreed. When the Staff in Mesopotamia and Simla, eight months after the beginning of the campaign, realised the connection between reinforcements and transport and the enormous demands of the lengthened line, requisitions were made for increased shipping. It was found that vessels of the required type did not exist in any quantity in India or elsewhere, and a shallow-draught fleet especially adapted for Tigris navigation had to be built; but it was not until a year after the order had been issued, and in some cases eighteen months, that the new craft were available for use in Mesopotamia.

The failure of the Staff to grasp the transport situation until too late is difficult to understand, for the limitations of the Tigris fleet could be reduced to an arithmetical sum.

Without a railway, so many ships, and so many tugs

and barges and *mahailas*—i.e. so many tons of rations and material, could be delivered to the troops at a certain distance from the base every day. The daily consumption of a division worked out at *x* tons. Thus, given the number of troops, the question of supply becomes a very simple calculation. Three divisions need their — tons, and the greater the distance from the base the greater the tonnage demanded. A twenty days' journey for the round trip is a liberal average estimate for a vessel plying between Basra and Falahiyeh. Yet in June, 1916, in spite of all our efforts to increase the fleet, the transport available was not sufficient to feed the depleted force at the front. They were never on full rations. Any considerable advance would have taxed the machinery of supply to the breaking-point. The same force a hundred miles upstream would have suffered the privations of Kut. At Ctesiphon they would have starved. Baghdad, without a railway, was an impossible ideal.

The order of our advance from Ali Gharbi was first troops, then material, then land transport, last of all ambulances; not, as in that other river war, first material, then transport, then troops. But to compare the organisation of the Mesopotamian and Nile campaigns is hardly a fair parallel; for at the time of our advance on Khartum we had no other military preoccupations, whereas with India Iraq was a side-show. Considering what she had given to France, Egypt, and East Africa, it was difficult for her to keep a foot on dry land in Mesopotamia at all. With the footing she had, a railway would have secured and consolidated her advance, step by step, to Kut-el-Amara—possibly even to Baghdad.

The obstacles we had to contend with, how we might have met them, and why we failed to do so at this stage will fall into the account of a later phase of the campaign. General Lake stated in one of his dispatches that the number of steamers available in January, 1916, when the

Relieving Force left Ali Gharbi was practically the same as in June, 1916, when the first advance was made up the Tigris from Qurna. We had to double, treble and quadruple this fleet before Baghdad was in sight. Yet at the beginning, being nearer our base, we were in every respect better off for transport than the Turk. Even at El Orah, 260 miles up the river, we had the advantage of him. The first line of transport, as everybody knows, carries the ammunition and tools sufficient for the day to the army in the field. The second line carries the day's rations, kit, and blankets. The third line is the general reserve, from which the daily issues proceed; it does not, as a rule, come under the enemy's fire. With a line of communication 300 miles long the army is hard put to it which cannot depend on river or on rail.

In Mesopotamia the Tigris served as the third line for British and Turks alike. We, with our access to the sea, could increase and replenish our river transport, whereas the Turk had to carry on with the fleet we left him. He had five large river steamers north of Kut-el-Amara, but these could only carry as far as his base at Shumran, five miles north of General Townshend's position, which commanded the river and cut his line of communication south. From Shumran supplies were conveyed to the troops on either bank of the river by camels and donkeys.

As regards rations, the country was nearly, if not quite, self-supporting. Troops and equipment were carried downstream to Baghdad from Mosul or as far north as Jezireh on *kelleks*, the great skin rafts of the Tigris These were broken up at Baghdad and the skins sold or conveyed back by land. To supplement his river transport the enemy had his railway running north of Baghdad ninety miles to Samarrah, beyond which there was the gap of some 360 miles across the desert to the railhead at Ras-el-Ain. Until this line was completed and the tunnels driven through, in the Taurus and Amanus mountains

—that is, for an indefinite length of time—it was clear that the advantage in the transport of troops and equipment must be with us.

The carrying capacity of the Tigris fleet at the time of our advance was not equal to that of a single line of railway with an average supply of rolling stock. The river, with sufficient craft and the traffic well regulated, would have certain advantages over a railway, offering fewer vulnerable points and demanding a minimum of troops for guard duty; but the siding difficulties of the permanent way would have their parallel at low water in the narrows, especially between Ezra's Tomb and Qalat Salih and Amara, where it is difficult for ships to pass. Up to Qurna the Shatt-el-Arab is navigable for ocean-going steamers of 14 ft. draught; above it, vessels drawing 4 ft. of water are frequently held up, and except in the flood season one has to tie up at night.

The fleet of transports, mostly paddle steamers of from 400 to 500 tons, drawing from 3 ft. 6 in. to 5 ft. of water, each with a lighter attached starboard and port, keep pace with the army on the bank; and each brigade has its parent ship, from which it draws supplies. The parent ship is, in its turn, fed by the *mahailas*. These local river craft make a picturesque fleet with their high forward-sloping masts, huge rudder, lateen sail, and cut-away prow, pointed and barbed. They are painted like the Chinese junk, but with Arab designs and characters, the star and the crescent and figures like the signs of the zodiac, generally white on a ground of green or red or yellow. Each boat carries a large clay oven like an ant-heap, and the poop is boarded over for the crew. They were compared with the Nile *dahabiyah*, but are more after the pattern of the *nugger* of the Soudan. They are a wild, piratical-looking craft, rude and primitive as the Arabs who navigate them, and they would lend themselves well to illustrations of the Sagas.

The *mahaila* carries anything from fifteen to seventy tons. She can make ten miles a day towed against the current, and five or six knots under sail with a following wind. The bulk of this invaluable fleet was with us, and only an inconsiderable part in the hostile zone above Kut-el-Amara.

The Arab name for the long, narrow, canoe-shaped boat of the country, the gondola of Basra, is the *bellum*. It is poled or paddled, preferably poled, according to the depth of the water. The martial suggestion in the word was reduplicated during the amphibious phases of the campaign, when the craft were referred to in official dispatches as "war-bellums." They were collected and armoured with iron plate, and used for conveying infantry to the assault of the enemy's position. When the Arab boatmen decamped our sepoys were taught to punt and paddle. In the flooded state of the country during the advance up the Tigris in May and June, 1915, everything depended on this improvised flotilla, and again in July when General Gorringe's column advanced up the Euphrates from Qurna across the Hammar Lake to Suq-esh-Sheyukh and Nasiriyeh.

To supplement the self-respecting paddle steamers of the Tigris the most heterogeneous collection of scrap-iron and remnants of river traffic were gathered in, taxing the resources of India's inland navigation from Bhamo to Sind. How this craft ever found its way over the ocean the Providence which watches over the improvident alone knows. Beyond question the boat of the most catholic ancestry on the Tigris in those early days was the *Aerial*, half houseboat, half aeroplane. Its hull was from the Brahmaputra, and it was fitted with an air propeller and a 50-horse-power semi-Diesel-type engine, and it made more noise than a minor battle. It once plied as a shikar boat in Assam, but its owner and navigator had a happy inspiration, and this miracle of private improvisa-

tion became the officially recognised hospital ferry, plying hourly between the field ambulance on the river bank and the hospital camp. For months it ran the gauntlet of shot and shell and mine, and the adventures of its navigator between Ctesiphon and Sheikh Saad alone would provide material for a bulky volume.

Another boat indigenous to the Tigris is the cauldron-like *gufar* of Baghdad, probably the oldest vessel in the world. A *gufar* moored alongside the *Aerial* offers a striking picture in the evolution of craft. It is a reed basket with wooden uprights, plastered over with pitch from the bitumen wells of Hitt. Herodotus describes *gufars* as being "round as bucklers," spinning downstream with merchandise from Nineveh to Babylon. Each *gufar* carried a donkey, and was navigated by two men. Arrived in Babylon, and the merchandise disposed of, it was dismembered and the parts carried back overland by the passenger ass. We first met with these craft at Amara—their most northerly limit upstream is Tekrit.

Our land transport had not the same interest of variety and improvisation as the Tigris fleet. It was the usual complement of an Indian frontier campaign. The first and second lines were served by pack mules. There were Indian Army transport carts drawn by mules and ponies, camels, and a bullock train for the heavy guns. It is doubtful if any other army can count on being so efficiently served in the way of transport when fighting in an inhospitable country. The Indian S. and T. man with his wide experience of campaigns in diverse climates, hot and cold, moist and dry, from Somaliland and the Sudan to Tibet and the Abor country, has come near to perfecting his art—thanks to the inestimable virtues of the mule and the *drabi*. In Mesopotamia the pack and cart transport was as good as ever; the only drawback was that there was not enough.

In the old days before the war the *drabi* was a worthy drudge, and as such respected. In the hot weather he was trekking up and down hill roads; in the cold weather there were manœuvres; in the leave season he could not be spared; so he saw little of the bosom of his family. He got more kicks and less ha'pence than anybody else in the army. Perhaps it is adversity that has moulded him. Now, like so many of the obscure, he has achieved distinction. No one any longer thinks of the *drabi* as a non-combatant. Before August, 1914, there was only one case in which an Indian mule-driver received a decoration; in the Great War he has come into his own. At Sahil and Shalba alone six members of the corps were awarded the Indian Order of Merit. And in France the *drabi's izzat* was high. It was a *drabi* who pursued his escaping mule almost into the German lines at Loos, crying out that the beast had broken his heel rope and that his Sahib would be angry. It was a *drabi* who sat through the whole of the bombardment at Neuve Chapelle when all the rest of his column had taken cover. He wandered about all night unable to find his destination. His cart was written off, for the bombardier in charge, who had obeyed the order "All into your dug-outs," said that nothing could live through that fire. In the morning Muhammad Ali turned up at brigade headquarters with his ammunition, explaining that he had lost the way. "Rasta bulgya, Hazur." When asked what the fire was like, he said that the wind from the shells was like the monsoon in the hills at Dharmsala.

And then at El Hannah there was Ali Hussein, *drabi*, who must needs report himself sick on January 23rd. The doctor found a bullet in his shoulder.

"When were you wounded?" he asked.

"In the battle, Sahib."

"But that was on the 21st. Why did you not report yourself before?"

"Sahib," he said, fearing reproof, "I had no time. The wounded were too many."

He had made the journey to the trenches in his cart ten or a dozen times through the darkness and cold and mud and rain.

It is not the fearlessness of the *drabi*, brave as he is, which has won him esteem so much as the sense so deeply rooted in him that his immediate job is the only essential thing. There were marches and battles in this campaign which taxed the resources of human endurance, but the *drabi* always played up, whether in the floods of Shaiba or in the burning march from Ahwaz to Amara in June, whether in taking up ammunition to the firing line or in bringing back the wounded from the field. "Every one of them," an officer said, writing to his wife, "deserves a gold medal."

If beasts were decorated the mule would be covered with ribbons. He also knows not defeat. His hardiness is proverbial; none of the plagues of Mesopotamia have affected his sang-froid. The pack mule as a rule served the first line; in the second line the brunt of the work fell on the ponies and mules of the Jaipur and Bharatpur Imperial Service Transport Corps. The ponies are country-breds, ungelded, and stand about 13.2. They go in a yoke with a curricle bar, and are as serviceable as the cart they draw, which is the most handy, adaptable, indestructible vehicle over rough ground. They carry ten maunds when the going is dry, and plough through mud in which an ambulance limber or a general service wagon sticks fast. One seldom sees a stranded Indian Army Transport cart among the wreckage of a battle. The A.T. carts were at Shaiba in January, 1915, plying daily between the camp and Basra through five miles of flood, in 2 ft. or 3 ft. of water with frequent bog-holes, in which the animals and carts were submerged. The ponies had to be unhooked, the carts unloaded, man-handled with

drag-ropes, and loaded again. From Shaiba they went to Ahwaz, and thence on that historic desert march in June through sand and swamp by Illah and Bisaitin to Amara. Thence to Ali Gharbi, Kut-el-Amara, and Ctesiphon, back to Ali Gharbi, and on again in the new advance. Thirteen months with little halt in their daily convoy work, with constant covering of their tracks. The same carts, same animals, same men. And they looked as if they could do it again. It was commonly reported in the Force—with what truth I cannot say—that the Jaipur pony transport train won the battle of Shaiba. The story is that when the 200 carts appeared cantering up on the horizon in the blur of the mirage as dusk fell, the Turkish general, taking them for a new mountain battery, decamped forthwith.

The camel up to this point was but an auxiliary in the second line of transport; much was expected of him, though he was woefully misunderstood. Like the yak, he is a providentially ascetic beast, and has the supreme virtue of living on the soil. The prickly *agool* is sufficient for his needs on most days, but when marching he is given his balls of moistened grain. The riverain breed, or *Judi*, as he is locally called, is not, like his *Bedawi* brother, trained to go without water, but he is proof against camel fly, and has certain virtues of his own.

In spite of his nobbly extremities, wooden diet, and grotesquely proportioned limbs, the camel is a dainty beast. His mincing gait and supercilious glances are generally attributed to pose; as a matter of fact, they are the expression of an inward and unsuspected delicacy. Neither the British officer nor the Indian sepoy, as a rule, understands the camel of a strange land. There have been exceptions, as in the case of the camelry of the Guards at Khartum, where the camel became as much a cult as the horse, and the gurgling protests of the beast were heard in the camp no more. But too often the

camel's uncouth bulk, combined with his uncanny asceticism, leaves a false impression of hardiness, and adds to his yoke. Weight is piled on; his cries and bubblings ascend to deaf ears; he is hard driven on the march, and given any kind of bed, wet or dry, to lie on. Then the S. and T. man, new to his job, comes into mess of an evening and reviles his "—— camels," who have broken down "out of spite." His argument is that, being all leg and neck, his heart and guts must be wanting, and he therefore lacks the spirit to survive adversity.

He is brittle, and will break his leg kicking against a stone, and he will split up and die if his legs slip apart in the mud. In this country snow kills him. He is as sensitive to damp as a hypochondriacal City clerk, and will catch a fatal cold if asked to doss in a swamp. But well cared for, sufficiently equipped, and tactfully treated, he is second only to the mule as a beast of burden. I believe that the camel is full of curiosity and that he has a soul. I once rode a beast over five hundred miles of desert which held only one pool. When we reached the water I expected him to drink greedily; instead he hesitated, wetted his lips, and admired the setting sun. He sipped again, as Dr. Middleton might have sipped his port, and then, after a few more fastidious glances east and west, took a satisfying draught.

The Mesopotamian beast is a fast walker. He deserved well of us when he kept up with the cavalry in their forced march from Kut to Ali Gharbi. He is a lighter breed than the Indian, but more enduring, and will carry an equal weight. He steps more gingerly in mud and preserves a better balance. He is more docile; he seldom bites; and when he kicks it is upon provocation. A transport officer in the Force made the discovery that *oonts* can kick kneeling with a sudden semicircular sweep of the leg. One has to be chary of the beast that is reclining on one haunch.

The camels in Mesopotamia have no nose-rings. They are not driven in single file, threaded from nose to tail, as in India, but in a herd grazing. The camel driver walks behind; only in camp and confined places he walks ahead, calling "Hadua! Hadua!" When he rides he guides his beast with a stick.

As I write this chapter in my tent the mules are being fed. There is always satisfaction to be had out of watching that repast, for the *kachar*, unlike the camel, is a beast of frank appetite. As the grain is being mixed in a blanket on the ground every member of the cadre is watching intently. An officer's voice is heard, "Is the *dhana* ready?" The havildar replies, in a language understood by the corps, "Ready, Sahib." Every beast pricks up his ears. Then the nosebags go round. And a chorus goes up; an indescribable chant, singing and neighing and mewing and braying. Such a grace before meat as seldom greets the ears of the Giver of all supplies.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ATTACK ON THE DUJAILA REDOUBT

THE attack on March 8th on the Sinn position on the right bank was perhaps the most criticised action in the advance. The scheme was to carry the Dujaila Redoubt, the key of the whole position, and thence to pivot round in the enemy's rear and cut off his communications, thus making the right bank untenable. It was hoped that this manœuvre would compel the Turks to evacuate the north bank, leaving us the command of the river and an open door to Kut.

We put into the field for these operations the 3rd Division and three Brigades, the 28th, 35th, and 36th, in all some 20,000 men, including cavalry, sappers, and pioneers. The Turkish force on the right bank between the Shatt-el-Hai and our position was estimated at 10,000, not including the reserves that could be brought up from Shumran or ferried across the Tigris at Magasis. The total force at their command between Baghdad and the firing line was estimated at 35,000.

A bolder, though ultimately less ambitious, scheme would have been, instead of attacking the Sinn position, to march straight on Kut and extricate Townshend and his garrison so that they could have joined camps with Aylmer at a point in advance of Orah, leaving the Turk the empty prize of Kut, and the command for the time being of this stretch of the river. Experience had taught us that the cost of these frontal attacks, even when successful, is prohibitive.

We had not recovered from the wastage of January

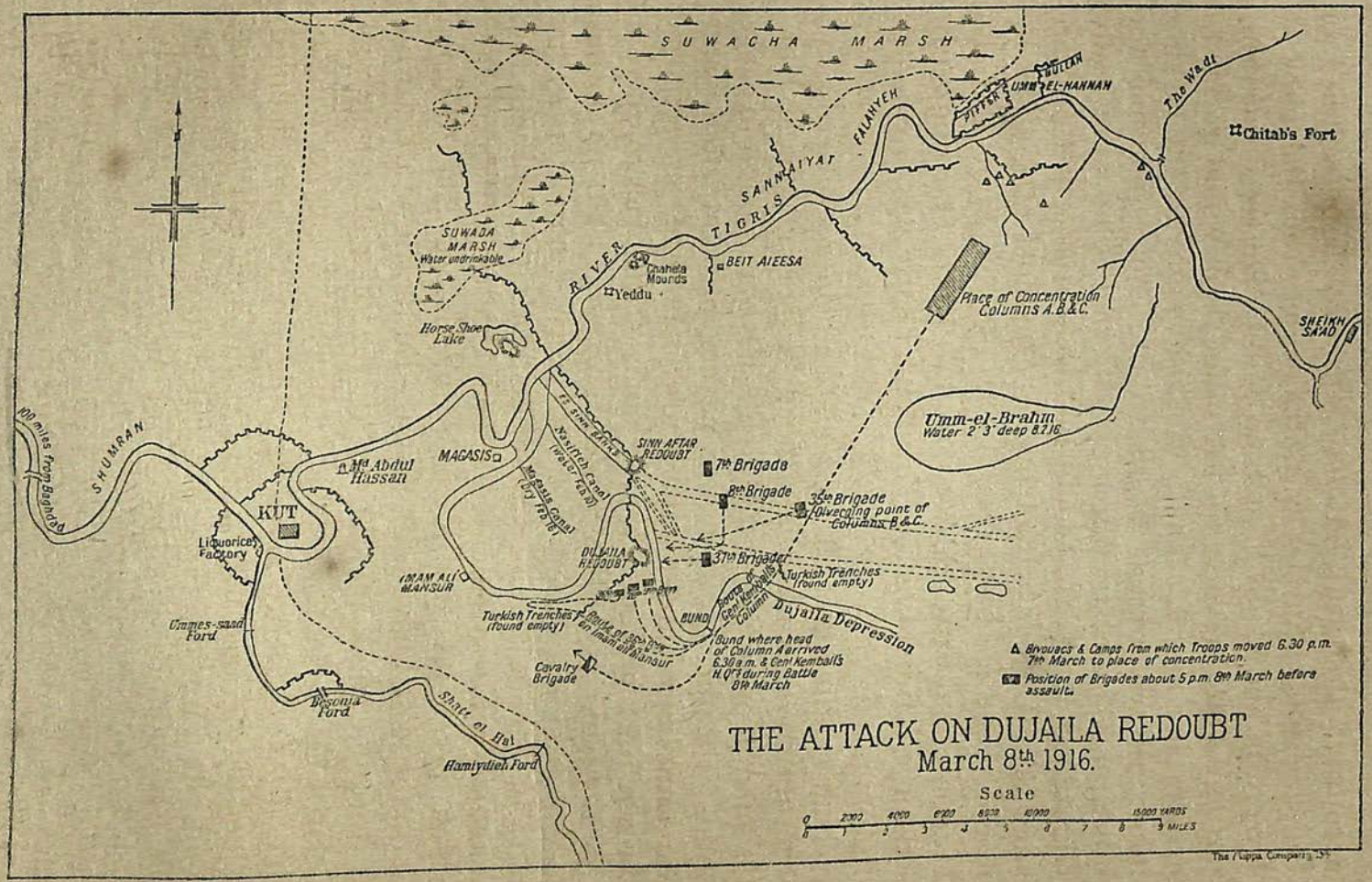
7th, 12th, and 21st; and to waste ourselves again with reinforcements in sight seemed like the act of a man with a broken limb who takes his splints off a day or two before the bone has united. The essential thing was to concentrate our forces for one blow, not to fritter them away in detail at the very moment when reinforcements were coming up the river. On March 8th the first two battalions of the 13th Division had arrived at Orah. By March 25th the complete division was encamped at Sheikh Saad. With this force we might have held the enemy at Dujaila and marched straight on Kut. That is to say, if Townshend could have held out till we were ready for the stroke. At the moment we had not sufficient troops, had we gone through to Kut, to leave a force behind to protect our flank and contain the enemy at Dujaila. There would have been no alternative but to go straight through with the force we had, independently of communications, relying on Kut for supplies and ammunition, and to fight our way back with Townshend. This is the kind of adventure which many strategists condemn in the most unqualified language. "It defies all the axioms," they say. But it has been by the defiance of axioms that most great *coups* have been brought off in history, and I for one prayed at the time that the scheme might commend itself to the Staff.

Townshend, as we learnt afterwards, was in no immediate necessity, though we believed that the urgency of the case was the real explanation of this premature attack on the enemy's main position. But the Staff's bugbear was the rising of the river. They feared that if they waited for the 13th Division operations would be hampered by floods. March 15th was the latest date quoted on which we could count with any certainty on being free from inundation. If this was correct it was a sound and sufficient reason for pushing on our advance; and other and subsidiary motives need not be taken into

account. Political considerations may have weighed in the decision. Turkey was staggering from the blow at Erzerum, and it was hoped, no doubt, that the disheartening effect of a reverse on her other flank would go far to destroy her moral. There was also, perhaps, the lurking hope, always present in the Staff, and responsible for much vague and tentative action, that if he were really frightened the Turk would go; that at the first appearance of a British helmet over the parapet at Dujaila he would take to his heels, clear out of Sinn and El Hannah, and leave the road open to Kut. Our singularly sanguine estimate of the Turk's instability was frequently disappointed.

But granted that an immediate advance was necessary, whether through menace of flood or short rations at Kut, the plan of operations on March 8th was thorough in every detail; the night march was a very brilliant affair; and the unpreparedness of the Turk, who had no outposts thrown out, played into our hands. The bar to success was the want of fluidity in a scheme which left no option to subordinate commanders to turn circumstances to account. If A followed upon B, and C on D, with the exactness of a problem of Euclid or of a natural law which precludes any hitch or mischance, the Dujaila Redoubt would have been taken. But battles are not won by formulæ; and on March 8th the plan of action was inelastic; it was not modified to meet new emergencies as they arose. As we shall see, the precise and detailed orders of the day before held good, and half the force stood idly by while the other half, delayed by the inevitable contretemps of a long night march, were unable to push in until the opportunity had passed.

The assembly was at the Pools of Siloam, a spot two miles south-west of Thorny Nullah, where we used to water our horses. We left camp at seven, just as it was getting dark. We had gone a mile when we saw the


SUWACHA MARSH
SUWADA MARSH
Water undrinkable
Horse Shoe Lake
RIVER TIGRIS
SANNAIYAT
FALAHYEH
Yeddu
BEIT AIEESA
Chitab's Fort
The Wadi
Place of Concentration Columns A.B.&C.
SHEIKH SAAD
Umm-el-Brahm
Water 2' 3' deep 8.7.16
100 miles from Baghdad
SHUMRAN
KUT
Liquorice Factory
Md Abdul Hassan
MAGASIS
Nasrich Canal (water 1916)
Magasis Canal (dry 1916)
SINN AFTAR REDOUBT
7th Brigade
8th Brigade
35th Brigade (Divergent point of Columns B & C.
DUJAILA REDOUBT
37th Brigade
IMAM ALI MANSUR
Turkish Trenches (found empty)
Ummes-saad Ford
Dujaila Depression
BUND
Bund where head of Column arrived 6.30 a.m. & Cent Kemball's H.Qrs during Battle 8th March
Cavalry Brigade
Bassoma Ford
Shatt el Hai
Hamiydieh Ford
Bivouacs & Camps from which Troops moved 6.30 p.m. 7th March to place of concentration.
Position of Brigades about 5 p.m. 8th March before assault.
THE ATTACK ON DUJAILA REDOUBT
March 8th 1916.
Scale
0 2000 4000 6000 8000 10000 15000 YARDS
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 MILES

lamps of the assembly posts. Twenty thousand men were to meet here from different points, horse and foot and guns. They would proceed in three columns to a point south of west, where they would bifurcate and take a new direction, Columns A and B (General Kemball) making for the depression south of the Dujaila Redoubt, Column C (General Keary) for a point facing the Turkish lines between the Dujaila and Sinn Aftar Redoubts. The defect in the plan, an unavoidable defect if secrecy were to be maintained and the objective gained before daylight, was that not enough time was allowed for concentration. The converging units were given a bare two hours to cover the ground between the bivouacs and the rendezvous, which in the case of some of the artillery brigades and the ammunition column meant a seven miles' march. Also the seven infantry brigades were hampered by transport, ambulances, and guns which moved with the Force and not behind it—the natural place for such impedimenta in a night march which, with enemy trenches to be crossed eight miles from the rendezvous, might develop into a night attack. These outposts, as it proved, were unoccupied. Had they been held, the difficulty of the operations would have been incalculably increased.

The artillery were an hour and a half late at the rendezvous—a delay almost inevitable in the nature of things; and in spite of the allowance of an hour's margin for accidents by the way this time was never made good. Nevertheless, it was a remarkable night march, probably without a parallel in our military history. I remember as we lay under the red lamp waiting for the artillery somebody quoted Tel-el-Kebir as a precedent. But at Tel-el-Kebir the advance by night was only six miles, the time taken three hours and twenty minutes, and the force engaged 11,000 bayonets, 2,000 sabres and 60 guns. Our column of nearly 20,000 men, with transport, ambulances, and guns, was two miles in depth and 600 yards

from flank to flank. The distance we covered by night was almost three times as great as at Tel-el-Kebir; the column under arms was three times as long; and the total force nearly twice as large.[1] The assembling and guidance of so large a force over country untrodden by us previously, and featureless save for a nullah and some scattered sandhills, demanded something like genius in discipline and organisation.

I was with the sapper who guided the column. Our odd little party reported themselves to the Staff officer under the red lamp of Column A. "Who are you?" he asked, and it tickled my vanity to think that we, the scouts, were for the moment the most vital organ of the whole machine. If anything miscarried with us, it would mean confusion, perhaps disaster; at any rate, the dislocation of their carefully laid schemes. For in making a flank march round the enemy's position we were disregarding, with justifiable confidence, the first axiom of war.

We were an odd group. There was the sapper guide. He had his steps to count, and his compass to look to when his eye was not on a bearing of the stars. And there was the guard of the guide to protect him from the officious suggestions of such senior officers as might have doubts as to the correctness of his line. Everything must depend on one head, and any interruption might throw him off his course. As we were starting I heard a digression under the lamp.

"I make it half-past five from Sirius."

"I make it two fingers left of that."

"Oh, you're going by the Corps map."

"Two hundred and six degrees true."

"I was going by magnetic bearing."

Ominous warning of what might happen if too many guides directed the march!

[1] The casualties in the action were more than five times as heavy—3,476 Dujaila, 469 Tel-el-Kebir.

Then there was the man with the bicycle. We had no cyclometer, but two men checked the revolution of the wheel. And there were other counters of steps, of whom I was one, for purposes of comparison. From these an aggregate distance was struck. But it was not until we were well on the march that I noticed the man with the pace stick, who staggered and veered like an inebriated crab in his efforts to extricate his biped from the unevenness of the ground before he was trampled down by the column. I watched him with a curious fascination, and as I grew sleepier and sleepier that part of my consciousness which was not counting steps recognised him as a cripple who had come out to Mesopotamia in this special rôle "to do his bit." His humped pack protruding under his mackintosh as he laboured forward, bent into a hoop, must have suggested the recognition, which was accepted as a fact until I pulled myself together at the next halt and heard the mechanical and unimaginative half of me repeat, "Four thousand seven hundred and twenty-one." The man raised himself into erectness with a groan, and a crippled greengrocer whom I had known in my youth, to me the basic type of hunchback, became an upstanding private of the Buffs.

Walking thus in the dark, with the wind in one's face, at a kind of funeral goose-step, it is very easy to fall asleep. Riding a camel for hours in the night I have had the same sense of breasting interminable waves which lap one into a trance. The odds were that we should blunder into some Turkish picket or patrol. Had we done so, I for one should have been incapable of spontaneous action. Looking back, it was hard to realise that the inky masses behind, like a column of following smoke, were an army on the march. The stillness was so profound one heard nothing save the howl of the jackal, the cry of flighting geese, and the ungreased wheel of an ammunition limber or the click of a picket-

ing peg against a stirrup. We came to a place where a cavalry patrol had halted, and the impact of a nailed boot on a bully beef tin resounded like the crack of a rifle. The instinct to smoke was almost irresistible. A dozen times one's hand felt for one's pipe, but not a match was struck in all that army of 20,000 men. Sometimes one felt that one was moving in a circle. One could swear to a light on the horizon, hands gesticulating on a bank. Many of us confessed to a persistent instinct which would have swung us round to the right, but the sapper guide was undivertible. Suddenly we came upon the Turkish trenches. They were empty—an abandoned outpost. The column halted, made a circuit. I felt that we were involved in an interminable coil, a knot that could not be unravelled till dawn. We were passing each other, going different ways, and nobody knew who was who. But we swung into direct line without a hitch. It was a miracle of discipline and leadership. At the next long halt, the point of bifurcation, the counter of steps was relieved. It had turned bitterly cold. I found my sowar on the flank, took a second horse-blanket from under the saddle, rolled up in it, and fell so soundly asleep that the column almost rode over me when they started again.

An hour after that the sapper spoke. The strain was ended. We had struck the sandhills of the depression. Then we saw the flash of Townshend's guns at Kut, a comforting assurance of the directness of our line. That the surprise of the Turk was complete was shown by the fires of the Arab encampments, between which we passed silently in the false light. A mile or two to our north and west the camp fires of the Turks were already glowing.

Flank guards were sent out. They passed among the Arab tents without a shot being fired. Soon the growing light disclosed our formidable numbers. Ahead of

us there was a camp in the nullah itself. An old man just in the act of gathering fuel walked straight into us. He threw himself on his knees and lifted his hands with a Biblical suggestion of supplication, crying out "Ar rab, Ar rab"—an effective though probably unmerited shibboleth. As he knelt, his women at the other end of the camp were driving off the village flocks. Here I remembered that I was alone with the guide of a column in an event which ought to have been as historic as the relief of Khartum. Every white man would have stirred in his bed for a glimpse of this picture, and many yellow, black and brown. One does not generally realise the making of history when one is in its immediate perspective, but it had been borne in on us that the world was much concerned with the fate of the gallant little garrison of Kut. The King had twice cabled messages of hope and confidence to the troops; and I had a vision of Fleet Street now abed in its first matutinal slumbers soon to be roused to buzzing eloquence by news from the desert; news of the Relieving Force entering the Dujaila depression in the rear of the unsuspicious Turk. I resolutely stifled the presentiment of failure, for the man who spreads the contagion of doubt among fighting men is of more assistance to the enemy than a dozen uncensored war correspondents. I wished that we were not attacking Sinn, whittling away our reinforced strength in more frontal assaults. Straight ahead of us lay Kut, less than three hours by a forced march, and nothing to hold Townshend in save a thinly held line of trenches by the river and two guns which commanded his flying bridge—trenches and guns which would have been exposed had we advanced to our attack in front, flank and rear. There was one enemy battalion to be reckoned with three miles to the south-west, at the Bessouia Ford, but our cavalry could have held this and the bridgehead.

If we had gone on and the Sinn force had come out and attacked us in the open it was a consummation to be desired. But that was too much to hope. The Turk would, no doubt, have held his ground and thrown out trenches in our rear from the Dujaila Redoubt to the Shatt-el-Hai. These we should have had to force on our return. We had not troops or transport enough to hold Dujaila and make the advance at the same time; and a holding force would have been left in the air, cut off from communications and supplies. But in Kut there were provisions enough for us all. Supplies, which sufficed the garrison for seven weeks, would have fed it and the Relieving Force for three days. And three days might have seen us back in camp with Townshend saved, the vital and immediate object gained. The chance of clearing the Turks out of their positions on both banks of the river in time to save Kut was remote; yet the command of the Tigris was essential if we were going to stay there.

The one chance of taking the redoubt was surprise. We should have delivered our attack in the early hours before the Turkish reinforcements poured in from other points in the position. Instead we waited for our artillery to advertise our presence by shelling their camp. The same stampede of Arab horse and transport ensued as was witnessed during our bombardment of the El Hannah camp on February 22nd. It was comforting to watch this black line streaming across the plain towards their bridgehead on the Shatt-el-Hai. But there was that other stream less comforting to witness, the stream of infantry which poured in from all points of the position to reinforce the redoubt. Three thousand odd came from the Magasis Fort, where the enemy had their flying bridge, following the line of the Nasafiyeh Canal. At 9 A.M. the 6th Regiment began to arrive at Dujaila. Two battalions were sent to the trenches and two were

placed in local reserve in the rear, while the 5th Regiment came up to strengthen the line between Sinn Aftar and the Dujaila Redoubt. At the first alarm the Turks had begun to ferry the 52nd Division across from the left bank in their large *mashhufs* and skin rafts towed by motor-boats. By the airmen's estimate 3,000 of the 52nd crossed during the day. Some of these reinforcements advancing from Magasis came under our artillery fire as they marched in close order across the open. But every moment's delay added to the enemy's resisting power and weakened our advantage in the attack.

According to orders, General Keary's column on the east of the redoubt had to wait for the attack of General Kemball's column on the south before joining battle; but General Kemball's column, through no fault of its own, was late. It was to have deployed at 5.30, but it was not until 6.30 A.M. that it reached a point in the Dujaila depression a mile short of the bend where the deployment was to be made. The infantry were still mixed up with pack mules, artillery wagons and ambulances, and the batteries had to be detached from the column. At 7.15 the three brigades were deployed for the attack. The 36th Brigade was thrown out in the direction of the shrine Imam Ali Mansur, to clear some trenches three miles from the bend; the 9th and the 28th Brigades were ordered to close up and deploy for the assault on the Dujaila Redoubt. But surprise was now out of the question, for at seven o'clock the Corps artillery with Keary's column had opened fire on the Turkish position.

General Lake, in his dispatch, has thrown the blame for the delay implicitly on General Kemball, but the inexpiable blunder at Dujaila lay in the holding back of Keary's column, which might have carried the position early in the morning. General Aylmer, the Corps Commander, and General Gorringe, his Chief of Staff, were

with General Keary, and the responsibility lies with them. The march of the column was shorter and easier than that of General Kemball's column; they were up in time; and at daybreak the lightly held gap in the Turkish defences yawned patently in front of the 37th Brigade, who reported the weakness of the enemy opposite them. But they were not allowed to go in; the preconceived plan of battle was adhered to, and the chance was thrown away.

In the meanwhile General Kemball's column to the south moved slowly on in the face of a deadly fire from the rifles and machine guns in the concealed position to the left and the trenches in advance of the redoubt. The trenches against which the 36th Brigade advanced were found to be empty. This was as well, for the two brigades on their right, the 9th and 28th, were coming in for sufficiently heavy enfilade fire from the advanced trenches thrown out from the right flank of the Sinn position. The 9th Brigade attacked with their right facing the west corner of the Dujaila Redoubt; the 36th Brigade swung round in line on the extreme left. A series of attacks was made throughout the day, preceded by artillery fire, but on the south side we never really came to grips. The three brigades were punished heavily all day; they barely sighted a Turk; it is doubtful if they were ever within a thousand yards of the enemy's main position; and they were unsupported by any movement of Column C to the east of the redoubt until late in the afternoon.

Once more it was shown that half an hour's bombardment of earthworks by field guns with little high explosive and no aeroplane observation makes but an ineffectual screen for advancing infantry, a lesson which had been demonstrated upon our thinned battalions time and again. The tradition dies hard among the Staff that so long as there is gun support—visible evidence of drift-

ing smoke and rising earth in the approximate neighbourhood of the enemy's position—the infantry ought to break through. Such, too, is naturally the gunner's persuasion. I heard a youthful subaltern ejaculate with grave complacency, as his shrapnel burst beyond the redoubt, "There goes another bit of ointment on the spot." Who would not be a gunner on these days dispensing ointment? For the lot of the infantryman is hard. Picture the private of the Somersets or the H.L.I. dragging his tired limbs towards the position. It is a torrid day of sultry heat, a waterless land, and his water-bottle is already empty. But he has his two days' rations, pack, extra ammunition and entrenching tools to drag along with him; whenever he lifts his head the bullets sing round it; and there are still fifteen hundred yards to the foot of the glacis. He piles his pack and is eased of a physical burden, but there is little in his environment to refresh the spirit. Experience has not associated these attacks with the glamour of victory. The men behind the parapet are fresh and keen, and not inferior in numbers, and by every law of the game each man at the loophole is as good as six outside.

Yet when we get back to camp with our lack of good news we shall be asked, "What went wrong?" "Why didn't it come off?" "Didn't all the regiments play up?" "Yes, they played up all right, but why should it come off?" To take a position from the enemy some very definite superiority is needed, if not in numbers or position, then in strategy or moral. As for numbers, on this occasion there was probably very little margin on either side; in position the advantage was theirs, an advantage of at least six to one. In strategy, whatever the initial merit of the scheme, it did not fructify, as the essence of it, surprise, was not turned to account. In moral the Turkish infantry is as stubborn as any in Europe. The defenders of the Dujaila Redoubt were

the pick of the Ottoman Army, flushed with the success of the Dardanelles. They were fresh troops, and strongly entrenched in a redoubt with a steep glacis rising 25 ft. above the plain. Reverse the position; put our own men behind the parapet, and they would have held it till doom. But it would be rating the Turk as but the sixth part of a man to presuppose in him, under the circumstances, a tendency to quit.

At half-past four the attack had not progressed, and I rode across, some four miles, to see how General Keary's column was faring on the east side of the redoubt. It had been an exciting day, and the sense of the tragic failure of it all, and the friends one was losing in this fruitless sacrifice, had not had time to sink in. On the top of the experience with the sapper guide in the night march, I had had half an hour with the cavalry rounding up some Arabs in flight. Then I had been in the infantry attack with General Christian's brigade (36th), when we had found the Turkish trenches unoccupied, and came in for some heavy enfilade machine-gun fire from Sinn. All this was before ten o'clock. It is difficult to realise the interminable length of a day of battle succeeding a night march. Though I had been riding most of the time and carried nothing heavier than a revolver and haversack, I was near the end of my tether in this intense heat. I would rather have been shot at, at a hundred and fifty yards, than have walked another mile. Yet some of the brigades had been on the move all the night of the 6th-7th, as well as on the night of the 7th-8th. I could not conceive the strength of spirit and limb which carried the infantryman with his enormous pack and heavy rifle on further marches, preparatory to further attacks; but for them it was but the beginning of the day.

With General Keary's column the attack in the evening on the east of the redoubt was carried to the

glacis, and two of the enemy's trenches were occupied, though, as I learnt afterwards, the troops were very near the limits of endurance. Owing to a stoppage in the pumps near Thorny Nullah the 8th Brigade, who made the assault, had left camp the night before without filling their water bottles. They had been digging themselves in, supporting the artillery; covering the flank, now of the 7th, now of the 37th Brigade; advancing and demonstrating and retiring all day; and had half an hour's rest after they had piled their packs before the assault. At 4.9 P.M. they were ordered to attack the Dujaila Redoubt and to push the assault home at all costs. The artillery would support the attack by bombarding the redoubt, lifting their fire at 5.15 P.M. The 37th Brigade (two battalions) on the left would go in at the same time.

The 37th Brigade the 1/2nd Gurkhas (2) and the 1/4th Somersets (4) had been in close proximity to the redoubt all day. They had come up at dawn starting a small Arab picket which must have given the first alarm to the Turks. They were under orders to halt at 1,200 yards, and they made it the shortest 1,200 yards possible. Both battalions are convinced that they might have walked straight in, and this supports the airman's story that there was only a picket in the redoubt. At first not a head was visible, but as the morning wore on they watched the Turks coming up from behind at a run, just a glimpse of each head as the man dived into the trench and disappeared. At two o'clock they received orders to cooperate with General Kemball's attack from the south and to follow on if the position were captured. They advanced within 600 yards, coming into heavy machine-gun fire from their left. Then in the evening two companies of the Somersets and a company and a half of the Gurkhas joined in the assault with the 8th Brigade.

The brigade formed up, the Manchesters and 59th

Rifles in the first line (the Manchesters on the left), the 2nd Rajputs in support, and the 47th Sikhs forming a third line prepared to act against a counter-attack from the enemy's left. The 36th and 28th Brigades, under General Kemball's command, were ordered to support the 8th Brigade by attacking the redoubt from the south, but they were held up by the forward trenches in front of the position.

I reached General Keary's column just as the assault was being launched. General Aylmer and General Gorringe and some of the Corps Staff were standing on a sandhill watching it with their glasses. It did not seem possible that the position could be carried after the earlier repulses. Nothing had changed except that our troops were exhausted—theirs, encouraged and reinforced. The sandhills where we stood with the Staff and watched the attack, the glory of the sunset, and those distant figures of men larger than human against the skyline, are bitter in the memory. The heart-sickening rattle of musketry and machine-guns which broke from the redoubt, a solid wall of sound, as soon as our last gun had spoken, was a knell with no solace of glory in it for those who looked on—imperishable glory for the thin wave of chivalry which streamed over the glacis and was engulfed inside.

It is hard to speak of the order for the assault in dispassionate terms. To repeat, when judgment is cooler, what was said at the moment would seem immoderate. We saw no hope of success in that last attack, and it seemed that all those lives were being devoted as an extenuation of a blunder in command.[1]

At 4.30 P.M. the brigade advanced at a great pace. The distance to be covered was 3,200 yards. They were steady as a machine, and did not stop to pick up their

[1] Of the 9,000 rifles available, less than half were employed in the attack; the remainder and a cavalry brigade were all covering.

wounded or dying. No one seeing them could have imagined them other than confident. But it was discipline and such soldierly virtues that gave them the air. Not reason. Certainly not the record of the higher command.

For the first thousand yards they met with few casualties; but once across the depression facing the redoubt they were exposed to intensive rifle, machine-gun and artillery fire. As on the 21st of January, it was not the Turk's tactics to hold in force the point of the line against which the bombardment was directed and the attack launched. The advancing troops were enfiladed right and left. The enemy's maxims were in forward positions on both flanks. The rifle and machine-gun fire came mostly from the trenches to the north and south of the redoubt, well concealed positions untouched by our artillery, while the shell fire from the guns of the Sinn Aftar Redoubt formed a barrage, recalling, by its direction and accuracy of burst, German artillery at its best.

At 5.20 the Manchesters and 59th Rifles gained a footing in the redoubt, followed closely by the 2nd Rajputs and a thin line of the Gurkhas and Somersets from the left. Two lines of trenches were occupied. They were found to be very deep, with a firing step and no parapet; they were almost invisible, and every advantage had been taken of the glacis slope leading up to them. Our artillery can have had little effect on these defences. The brigade advanced along the trenches outwards, right and left, bombing as they went, half blinded by the glare of the setting sun and the dust and smoke of concentrated rifle and shell fire. As our bombs gave out and the grenadiers fell one by one, the enemy developed a counter-attack. They came on in masses on both flanks under cover, bombing us with deadly effect; and, as on January 21st, literally jammed us out of our position.

The withdrawal was effected in good order. The left covered its own retirement; the retirement on the right was covered by the 47th Sikhs, who took up a position to the west of the depression and repulsed two separate attempts of the enemy to leave their position and follow up the brigade. The discipline was perfect as the thin line withdrew under intensive rifle and machine-gun fire and through the artillery barrage on the depression. When the British officers had fallen the Indian officers rallied their men and carried on the retirement with praiseworthy coolness.

At some 3,000 yards from the redoubt the brigade halted for the night; the wounded were collected and brought in; and every available man was put into the outpost line. The 8th Brigade had gone into action 2,301 strong; they came out 1,127. In the attack thirty-three British and twenty-three Indian officers fell; the 2nd Rajputs lost all their ten British officers (six killed), their medical officer, twelve out of sixteen Indian officers (seven killed), and 302 (110 killed) out of 534 rank and file. The company and a half of the 1/2nd Gurkhas, who went in with the 8th Brigade, were practically annihilated. Three of the four British officers were killed and one wounded. Ninety-four of the men were killed or missing and ninety wounded. The casualties in both columns during the action were 3,476—123 British officers, 62 Indian officers, 3,291 rank and file.

The Turk is not an enterprising fighter; he wisely sticks to his earthworks. We slept in our boots that night with our revolvers out of our holsters, but he made no attempt to rush our camp. In the morning, when he found that we were retiring, he followed us up and shelled our rearguard, pursuing closely till we turned our guns on him, when he retired. General Kemball's column in the Dujaila depression came in for a good deal of sporadic sniping in the dark. As they began their

retirement at dawn the "Buddoos," long mysteriously inactive, became again a feature of the skyline, looming in the rear of the column, and men were seen in British uniform, waving their helmets and crying out for help. It was a Hunnish trick of the Arab or Turk, and those who went to the rescue did not return. An officer shot in the face lay out half the night by the redoubt. He remembers being felt all over and thinking he was in the hands of a doctor. He was being stripped of his accoutrements. They were turning him over to unbuckle his belt when he regained consciousness. All round him the enemy were bayoneting the wounded, and their groans warned him to show no signs of life. It is easy to feign death when one is half dead, and the pool of blood in which he lay deceived the jackal crew, who did not think it worth while finishing him off. An hour or two afterwards he gained strength enough to crawl back to our lines.

We learnt from the Turks afterwards that they believed we had got round them. One still meets British officers who were convinced that they were falling back on the Hai on the morning of the 9th when they discovered, like Botha at Spion Kop, that it was a victory that had come to them and not a defeat. General Kemball believes that they were evacuating Sinn, and only followed us up when they learnt from their aeroplane reconnaissance that we were retiring. He reported a steady movement towards the Hai and the disappearance of all the enemy's camps, and he offered to hold on all day without support. The mind of the Turk is sometimes inscrutable, but knowing his tenacity, it is hard to believe that he can have been discouraged by the most ruinous reverse he had yet inflicted on us. The British Army at any rate knew they had been beaten; and when two or three days afterwards Reuter was posted up outside G.H.Q. with the message of their retirement "through

want of water" there was much irony, blasphemy, and derision in the camp.

Nevertheless the Turks frankly admitted that our night march on the 8th had beaten them, and that they would have had to quit if we had followed it up more promptly. They had considered the possibility of a surprise attack on their flank, but had concluded that a movement of the kind need not be seriously contemplated. It was a long march with our flank exposed for the greater part of it; preparations on so large a scale would be difficult to conceal; and it would need rapid concentration. Moreover, we had shown no activity in this direction, sent out no reconnaissances or patrols, and it was against all the rules of the game and contrary to our timid and tentative tactics to make a night march over ground we had not reconnoitred. They had ceased sending out pickets and patrols at night on the Jumailat ridge, or these had become occasional and perfunctory. This total unpreparedness, the bewilderment of the Arab, our blundering on to their empty outpost trenches, confirmed the statement we had from most of their officers that an attack upon their right flank was reckoned out of the question.

A very weary and dejected column trailed into camp on the night of the 9th, many so weary that they stumbled like drunken men. Nothing had been gained to balance our loss. We had put up a most formidable obstacle to our next advance, heartening the Turk and demonstrating what was in our mind by the half-hearted and tentative rehearsal of an act which should have been carried out with our whole strength, when all our resources were mature. And while increasing the obstacle that faced us, we had diminished our power to surmount it. The material attrition of our force, the weakening of our power to strike by the loss of numbers equal to more than a third of the garrison we were relieving, all

this was bad enough; but the discouragement to the survivors was worse. Good regiments do not lose moral, but they lose confidence by familiarity with ineptitude. Take a regiment like the Connaught Rangers. They arrived just in time for the El Hannah fight on January 21st, and now again they had had to advance long distances against fire from an invisible foe. There was much to expiate in pain and blood. They had met with heavy casualties without as much as seeing the enemy, and their sense of the intangibility of the Turk was becoming a dangerous thing. Two days afterwards chance, not generalship, gave them the encouragement they needed.

On our return from Sinn on the night of the 9th we had not fallen back on our forward position at Abu Roman and the sandhills as we might have done. We should have occupied these trenches. Apart from their strategical uses in an advance, now problematical, they gave us room to move in round Orah and prevented the enemy from bringing up guns and shelling our camp. However, this view was not taken by the Staff until the enemy, finding the trenches empty, occupied them themselves. Then two battalions were sent out on the morning of the 10th to hold Thorny Nullah and check their further advance. In the dark the Connaught Rangers overshot the low depression and found themselves among the Turks at Abu Roman. The surprise was mutual; but the joy was on the side of the Irishmen. They rushed the trenches in front of them with a holy glee. A hail of lead at close quarters was a challenge that appealed to them. And, what was better, numbers of the enemy were out of their trenches, standing about in the open. A Turk had fired his last round; three privates were on him with their bayonets as he turned. It was like coursing; they gained yard by yard, and it was a race who would get in first. The whole advance paused to

watch this little event, fascinated by the drama of it. Then into the mêlée again. The only thing that spoilt the Rangers' enjoyment of it was the hoisting of the white flag and the surrender of fifty-four men *en masse*.

The sandhills were held in force with guns and maxims, and as it grew light the attack could not be pressed further.

The regiment fell back on Thorny Nullah, which they had been ordered to hold, and which they had overshot in the dark—an error more costly to the Turk than to ourselves. The Rangers lost a hundred, the 89th Punjabis on their right two hundred odd.

But this little hand-to-hand scrap with the tangible Turk worked like a spell on their spirits, and one asked again—what would have happened if we had marched straight on Kut on the morning of the 8th? We were well round the enemy's flank, and within seven miles of Townshend. Such a bold move on our part would probably have thrown the Turk into confusion. For stubborn sticker as he is, he had never shown, in this campaign at least, any enterprise or initiative in attack, or organised discipline in the manipulation of a large force in the open. With anything like even conditions we have quickly established superiority of fire, and the advantage of artillery was all on our side. To have gone on, of course, and to have made a flank march across the enemy's position would have been dead against the manual. But we were not fighting mobile European troops; the enemy's communications would have been cut at the same time as ours; and our bases at Kut and Orah were only twenty-five miles apart, with supplies at each end and troops who would have gone through the fire of hell to join hands.

An adventure, perhaps; but no more fraught with disaster, when one takes into consideration the psychology of the Turk, than the attempt against time to break

through his defences, one by one. We had been consistently playing into his hands with these attacks, and no force which could conceivably be brought up the river in time could make good the wastage involved in each new assault. Fourteen thousand had already gone in the relief of nine thousand, and we had not touched the enemy's main position. Another fourteen thousand would be a low estimate of the cost of the attempt to break through and carry all the positions on the river bank. Whereas if we had let Kut go we might have got Townshend out and retired on Thorny Nullah, or the Abu Roman position, "effecting a junction at a point between the camps of the two generals." For it was the British general and his garrison to whom the world was looking, and not the barren township of Kut-el-Amara. Kut might have been taken afterwards when we had the transport and men, if we had reckoned it worth the sacrifice. But with the beleaguered garrison inside it drew us into straits in which Scylla and Charybdis met, pinning us down to an objective which the enemy could foresee and anticipate, involving military considerations with political in a manner which threatened immediate failure to the one and ultimate failure to the other, and committing us to huge sacrifices which, judged by all material standards, were disproportionate to the end. If we had gone for Townshend and not for Kut, we might have saved our face and our prestige, probably at little greater cost in able men than we paid for our abortive attacks on the Dujaila Redoubt—a tax which was to be doubled and trebled again during the next month, draining the best blood of the British Army.

I say "able men" because the difficulty of action was complicated by the question of Townshend's sick. If we could count on getting to Kut and staying there, which would involve clearing the enemy out of El Hannah, Sannaiyat and Sinn in order to bring up our river trans-

port, well and good. If we could not clear a way through before Townshend was at the end of his resources and the garrison fell, the sick would have to go in any case. In the alternative of sending a force to help Townshend to withdraw we might have brought back some of them, but it is doubtful if we could have brought back all. In that case it would have been necessary to leave a small guard over the beleaguered hospital, lest they should fall into the hands of the Arab before the arrival on the scene of the Turk.

No very glorious consummation, it will be objected, to such an enterprise. But then everything hung on the urgency of Townshend's case. And in the event of failure the new division, then on its way up the river, might have been counted on to deal with hostile Arab risings in our rear.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CHECK AT EL ORAH

OUR failure on March 8th made the case of Townshend's garrison almost hopeless. The floods would soon be up, our marching front contracted, and the ground impassable for artillery. We had been in the Orah camp since January 15th; we were to remain there indefinitely, it seemed; and there was abundant cause for depression. We could not shut our eyes to the fact that the Kut Relieving Force had suffered a succession of reverses which had no parallel in our military history.

There was no loss of moral: regimental tradition in the British Army is too strong for that. Officers and men gave their lives ungrudgingly, and those who survived took their punishment with a certain resigned and ironical humour. But there was no confidence in the higher command. Mesopotamia became the grave of reputations. Nixon, Aylmer, Gorringe, went down the river in melancholy succession. In Townshend alone we had faith, and the general impression was that the only way to save Kut was to extricate him by aeroplane and to place him in command of his own relieving force.

Officers in the 6th Division reckoned it a misfortune to be left out of an engagement. "We had a great bit of luck," a subaltern explained when describing the first battle of Qurna; "we were not in the brigade; but they wanted an extra battalion, so they threw us in." It was the most natural sentiment in the world, or it would have been in 1915, when in every scrap one stood at least a sporting chance. But here at Orah it sounded

strange after all these reverses. To get at the Turk in the open was a consummation we all prayed for; but we had forgotten the taste of victory, and it would be affectation to pretend that regiments cursed their bad luck when it did not fall to them to be thrown into these fruitless frontal attacks.

Of course, when a regiment was detached for action neither officers nor men were happy if they were left out of it. In spite of the appalling losses among officers, it had been easier to replace them than the rank and file. Thus it happened that in February, March and April many regiments had a surplus of captains and subalterns. As economical principles demanded that not more than one officer should go into action in proportion to sixty men, lots were drawn in some cases as to who should fight. Those who were not in it felt a natural, though illogical, shame. They were frankly miserable. The psychology of this need not be explained to such as understand how the regiment is everything in the world to the British officer.

In war we must expect a great number of people to die, and the proper attitude is to regard them as happily devoted to a soldier's grave. *Dulce et decorum est pro patriâ mori* is the only elegiac strain that is not reckoned maudlin and unprofitable. But in Mesopotamia, as the fruitlessness and waste of the campaign became more apparent, this attitude of mind became more and more difficult for non-combatants. Especially as the *patria*, wounded nearer the heart, needed these legions elsewhere.

One would sit in a regimental mess after an action and talk of "poor old So and So," and "So and So," who had been killed, never thinking that in a day or two these friends who were left, and were so buoyantly alive, would be under the same clay. When the regiment has been nearly wiped out one's instinct is to regard the

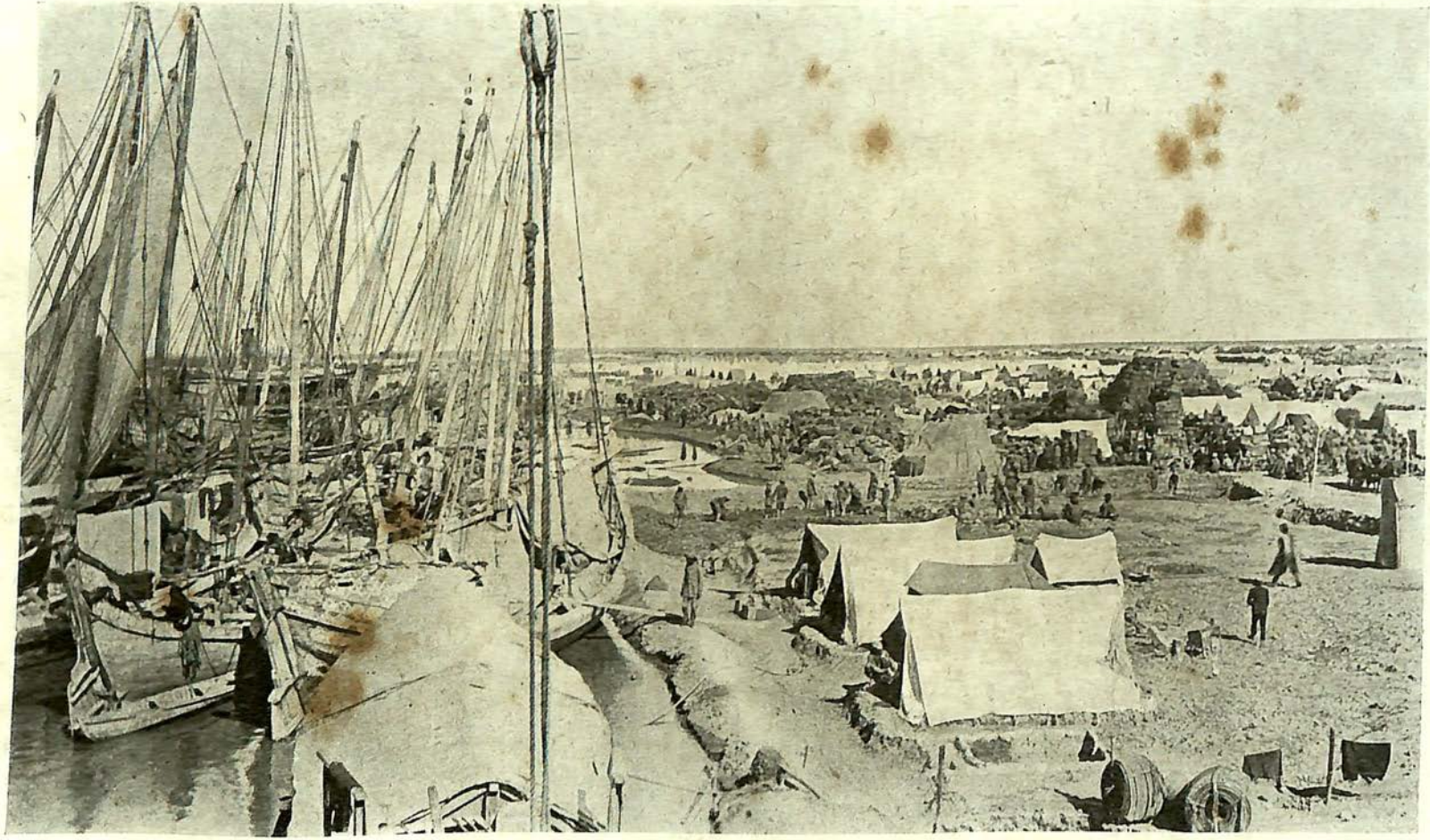
remnants as marked by Providence to survive, but even these had to be used up, eked out with new drafts, amalgamated with other remnants into composite battalions, led by lent officers. That little batch of survivors of the Black Watch, the padre, the doctor, the quartermaster, and the transport officer, seemed secure, but Duncan, the doctor, who "did not care a damn about shell fire," had been lent to the Leicesters on March 8th and shot through the head; and the transport officer had been invalided out of the country. I ran against five old friends in the Dujaila depression when we were waiting for the attack. Two were killed, two wounded a few hours afterwards; the fifth survived to fall at Sannaiyat.

Early in March brigades had to be eked out with composite battalions. The Seaforths and Black Watch were telescoped into the Highland Battalion; the 9th Bhopals were brought up to strength by oddments of Rajput regiments; the Norfolks and Dorsets became the "Norsets"; the Hants and Buffs the "Huffs"; the 37th and 41st Dogras became one.

Our failure to break through at El Hannah was the beginning of trench warfare. The conditions of France were repeated in Mesopotamia with modifications, and there were constant affairs of patrols, listening posts and pickets in No Man's Land. This phase was continued on the left bank for two and a half months from the 21st January, the day of the battle, till we captured the position on the morning of April 5th.

But the area covered by our trenches was deeper than anything on the same line of front in Flanders. When our firing line was within seventy yards of the enemy's wire entanglements, the whole labyrinth of parallels and communication trenches on a 1,200 yards front was made up of some sixteen miles of trench and sap-work.

In France men were glad to be out of the trenches



THE CAMP AT EL ORAH.

for a turn in billets, but here there were no resources to fall back on in camp, no luncheon parties at Bethune or Estaires. I heard a regiment that was going to be relieved by another, grumble at having to pack up and move. In the trenches there was always the mild excitement of a little sniping; we maintained our gun superiority all through; and the Turks never bothered us much with their shells. When it rained, of course, one was glad to be back in camp.

One brigade held our left by the river; the other our right by the marsh. On the river side one was a little cramped in the trenches, but by the marsh there were open spaces, dead ground, where one could breathe the air and stretch one's legs. By the end of March the lake had encroached on the Turkish position, flooding out 200 yards or more of trenches and leaving their wire entanglements in the water. One could sit on the parapet here and enjoy the view almost within hail of the enemy. The crack of bullets on the hard clay a few feet from one's head only added to the general sense of peace and security, for we were screened from frontal fire and the ground on our right between us and the water had become too dangerous for snipers. There the body of "Abdul," or "Herbert," as he was variously called, lay out as a warning to the adventurous Turk, just too far from us to be offensive; and snipers' pits and contact mines, the nearest but twenty yards from our feet, pointed to the activities of a week ago.

There is always something rather terrifying in the suggestion of a mine, but these were nothing more than old rusty-coloured shrapnel cases charged with explosives, plugged up with earth, and connected by a trip wire. One marked them by day, went out by night, cut the wires and brought them in. A subaltern had collected a round dozen of them and used them as weights to hold down his sandfly net. He slept peacefully between this

double border of explosives in the niche he had cut in the wall of the trench for his bed. He showed me how they worked. "You have to jerk them to make them go off," he explained; and tugged gently at the wire to show exactly what kind of pressure sufficed. I resisted the impulse to take to my heels, having a shrewd suspicion that his game was "to pull Eye-Witness's leg."

When the Turks evacuated Hannah they left some of these contact bombs behind, strewn about in the grass between their trenches. There was nothing except the wire to distinguish them from the empty shrapnel cases which littered the ground everywhere. I only heard of four victims. The poor old wireless horse stepped on one, and was shot through the head, and two men in the cart were wounded. A *drabi* exploded another, and very little was left of him.

After the caked mud and dust and glare of Orah Camp it was pleasant to spend a day or two in the trenches by the Suwacha Marsh. Trench dwellers in other parts of the lines, where life was hard and monotonous, would fulminate at this description, but to a visitor it was like going into the country out of town. One sat on a bank and watched the birds, and listened to the larks, and looked out towards the snow rim of the Pusht-i-Kuh. The nearest ridge is a little more than thirty miles, but it does not look seven; and the deep purple gorges which open into the plain draw one as passes always do, though in war time the call of the mountains is stronger. It would be easy to pack a mule and go off with a shot-gun into the hills; soon one would be amongst alpine flowers under the snow. But one would need half a battalion for escort. The peaceful, deserted-looking plain swarms with concealed Arabs who would cut your throat for the clothes you have on you, and have done the same by travellers since man can remember, without pretext of war.

We have no love for the Tigris Arabs, who have none of the decencies which are supposed to leaven the iniquity of primitive man, and we chuckled at a trick which was played them by an officer in the 26th Punjabis who went out shooting before breakfast with an escort of twenty-one men. He started early in the morning, and left sixteen of his sepoys in a nullah. Armed with a shot-gun and accompanied by the other five, he made a circuit of the ambush, beating the scrub for partridge and hare. Soon a body of Arabs appeared on the horizon, and for a long time they hesitated to close in. To encourage them the Captain Sahib ostentatiously sent his small escort back to camp. This increased the apparent odds in the Arabs' favour by some ten to one, and they were emboldened to come on. The British officer took to his legs, the sepoys in the nullah held their fire till the "Buddoos" were well on them, and four saddles were emptied at the first fusillade.

The ground between the trenches which lay to the south of the river, being swept by bullets and little trodden, attained something like lushness. There were some homely unobtrusive flowers here, shepherd's purse, dwarf mallow, wild barley, and a yellow trefoil, and in one place where a small camp had been pegged out the mown grass gave out the delicious smell of fresh hay. From the observation tower in the camp one could see two streaks of yellow like bright scarves laid across the mud, the only colour in view for miles. It was the flower of the wild mustard. One plot lay among our own trenches; the other in No Man's Land. We gathered and ate it. It was bitter and stringent, but it was the only green vegetable we were likely to taste for many a long month.

On the right bank of the river the landscape was more pastoral. In the neighbourhood of Thorny Nullah the prickly bushes were beginning to put on a vivid and short-

lived green; the flora of Mesopotamia is not rich or vivid, but there is no dearth of birds. Wild fowl abound. One disturbed innumerable flights of mallard, teal, pochard, and geese on the marshes by the Tigris and down the Shatt-el-Arab as far south as Fao. There were myriads of sand-grouse. They used to rise like columns of smoke at the first salvo of artillery in the morning. The cavalry sometimes brought down a swathe of them with their machine guns, a welcome change in the mess after tinned rabbit and bully beef. One put up black partridge and hare, and an occasional bustard; and in the brushwood nullahs one sometimes started a pig. There were plenty of lances handy, but our cavalry chargers put in a full day's work as it was, and pig-sticking was not encouraged. There was always the chance of blooding a lance on something better. At Qurna and Shaiba, in 1915, the boars gave intervals of sport, but these were far from slack days. A gunner arriving at Qurna in the spring thought he had come in for a circus, a kind of glorified Earl's Court and Olympia in one. The cavalry were having a scrap with the "Buddoo" on the left; a field battery was shelling the Turkish position on the right; and the horse-gunners were pig-sticking in between. One of the rules of the game was not to run your pig down in the Turkish lines. These were good days, very different from the cramped life in the trenches at El Hannah.

All this ground where we were working was the battlefield of the 21st January, and the sappers as they dug stirred up memories and exhalations. This is a depressing aspect of trench life. It would be a good text for one of Shakespeare's fools to moralise upon, that our generous, responsive, companionable, human clay should become as offensive in death as an ass or a mule.

There were pools on the marsh side of the trenches in which the men used to bathe and catch tortoises.

There was very little to do in the hours off duty when they were not digging or manning loopholes, and on active service the British soldier amuses himself with strange pets. He will catch and train anything that comes to hand, from a bear cub to a cockchafer, and he does not bother his head about the natural history of the beast. By the Suwacha Marsh the tortoise was the companion of his exile. When captured a string was tied to his leg and he was put over the parapet to graze. An animal who died under this diet, the pensioner of a Scot, was solemnly buried with an identification disc.

There was nothing frivolous in the nomenclature of the trenches, which began with the designation of regiments and brigades and as they approached nearer the Turkish lines ended in a climax of patriotism with "King Street," "Queen Street," "Prince Street," and "Emperor Street." The only official concession to sentiment or humour was "Balmoral Castle" near "Highland Post." "Hannah Mansions" was suggested, but discouraged, yet the spirit of the British soldier found expression, especially in the neighbourhood of the marsh. Round the corner there was a finger-post "To Kut"; another made it "Ten miles to Dundee." The cutting to an ambulance was named "Harley Street." I found a mouldy ration biscuit nailed to the parapet, and under it the inscription "Give us this day our daily bread."

But the thing which touches one's imagination most in the trenches is the little step cut in the front wall of the firing line which Tommy calls "H.P."—the taking-off point for "hopping the parapet." On the quietest days the air is not salubrious on the other side of the loopholes, and the "phuit, phuit" of the casual bullet is enough to cramp one's normal style of walking. During an assault, when these messengers are thick and hot like a hurricane, and the flash behind the rifles becomes a

continual sheet of flame, one's inner machinery needs a bit of winding up before one makes the plunge. We often used to wonder what regiments would be given the honour of the first "hop" over the wall.

Towards the end of March it became generally known that Kitchener's men were to make the assault. I was bivouacking in the trenches when the new division came in. First the Welsh Pioneers arrived; their strange Cymric accents were heard above the thud of the picks, mingling oddly with the Punjabi and Mahratta *bât* where the Indians were digging up to join the sap. A day or two before the attack parties of young officers would drop in to have a look round as one inspects a house one is taking over. They seemed full of confidence, and not at all impressed by the entanglements in front of the Turkish line.

The air was fraught with change. It was hard to believe that there might be a way out of the stalemate we had endured for months, that the next day or two might convert us into a mobile force again. Yet all this network of streets and habitations was soon to become empty, deserted as Pompeii or Babylon. The men who made them would be digging other mansions underground. The humours they had written on the wall would remain, but there would be none to read them save the incurious Arab.

CHAPTER XV

BREAKING THROUGH

FOUR-FIFTY-FIVE on the morning of April 5th was the hour fixed for breaking through at El Hannah. The preparations were complete. We had sapped up to within 100 yards of the enemy's trenches, to within 70 yards of his barbed-wire entanglements. We had broken down these entanglements with our gun-fire. After two and a half months' siege warfare our artillery registration was as nearly perfect as could be. The weight of metal that we were able to pour in had doubled since we first attacked the lines on January 21st. Our guns massed on both banks of the river could make the position a veritable hell. And in the actual assault nothing was left to chance. The 13th Division rehearsed the operations on a plan drawn out to scale. Every unit knew its place and task. Our plan was to carry the first line by surprise without gun support, creeping up stealthily with our bombing parties while the Turks would be waiting for the customary bombardment. When the first line were in, the second line were to go through them and carry the second line of defences; the third line would follow on and carry the third. The artillery were to open on the third line the moment we had gained a footing in the first. The whole scheme was perfectly carried out. The only thing wanting was surprise.

I was in the firing line half an hour before dawn. We expected a bloody struggle, but most of the Turks had evacuated in the night. They had left a bare hundred rifles and one machine gun to hold the position, and an

ironic notice "Au revoir à la prochaine bataille." One of them had stood up on the parapet at midnight and made a declamation in a strange tongue. We wondered what it was all about and whether he knew that we were on the point of launching our attack. He seemed aware of some crisis, and his tone was defiant, and we interpreted it as an invitation to "come on."

At 4.55 our first line with the bombing parties crept over the parapet. In a few seconds a cheer heard above the rifle and maxim fire told us that they had taken the trench. Immediately they were in our guns opened on the third line. The emptiness of the position caused as much disappointment as relief. The infantry were strung up to the pitch, they wanted a fight, and looked in vain for someone to kill. On the marsh side, where I was, the Turks were thinnest. The Warwicks on the left ran into a machine gun. They blew it up with hand grenades and killed the whole detachment. In other parts of the line batches of prisoners were taken. The second and third lines were found empty. We went on advancing under a screen of artillery fire which lifted from trench to trench as we swept down the Turkish position to the last line, a full mile in the rear.

It was good to have broken through and to be inspecting at close quarters familiar hostile landmarks which one had scanned so often through the telescope from "Jacob's Ladder" or the "Tower of Babel."

The Turkish observation mound was pitted with shell holes like a face marked with smallpox. Deep craters, yellow with lyddite, had made a moat round it. One only hoped that the Turks had been there sometimes to receive the salute. Not far away were graves with wooden headposts suggesting a sense of security from the Arab resurrectionist.

In this freshly acquired ground I was with a division that did not know me. Luckily I had had the foresight

to get a pass from the General—the first written order of the kind I had asked for—"to permit the bearer, Eye-Witness with the I.E.F., to pass into the fire trenches to witness the assault." When the first line fell I had "hopped the parapet." When the red flag waved over the second line I went on to the next trench. Kitchener's men were wound up taut for the fight, and were disappointed at the empty but genuine honour of a walk-over. A zealous young officer, fretting at a blank day and seeing no Turk, arrested me. A mysterious bearded figure in khaki, with belt and revolver but no badge on sleeve or shoulder, hovering in the dim light between the first and second line of the Turkish trenches, might well arouse suspicion. It was just the kind of trick the Hun would play on a new division, trusting to their ignorance of the personnel of the force. The young officer was very rude and turned his back on my civilities. As I took my pass from my pocket, I said something cheerful, wishing to extricate him from an embarrassing position. But he was not to be cajoled. He seized my revolver and put a corporal on guard over me until a brigade-major came up and made him disgorge his prey. This he did unwillingly and with visible disappointment. I might have reassured him. Hannah was the only empty covert he was likely to draw for a long time. He had a stomachful of fighting before the end of the day.

I heard other officers of the division express their boredom and disappointment that the enemy had not put up a better fight. They thought the Turk was on the run, but we of Mesopotamia knew better. We had learnt by experience that he is a master in the art of retreat. Each separate retirement had been in a manner a victory. Time was all they wanted—to starve out Kut and to wear us down as we advanced. The few barren miles between Sheikh Saad and Sannaiyat was a small price to pay for the best part of two British divisions. For two and a half

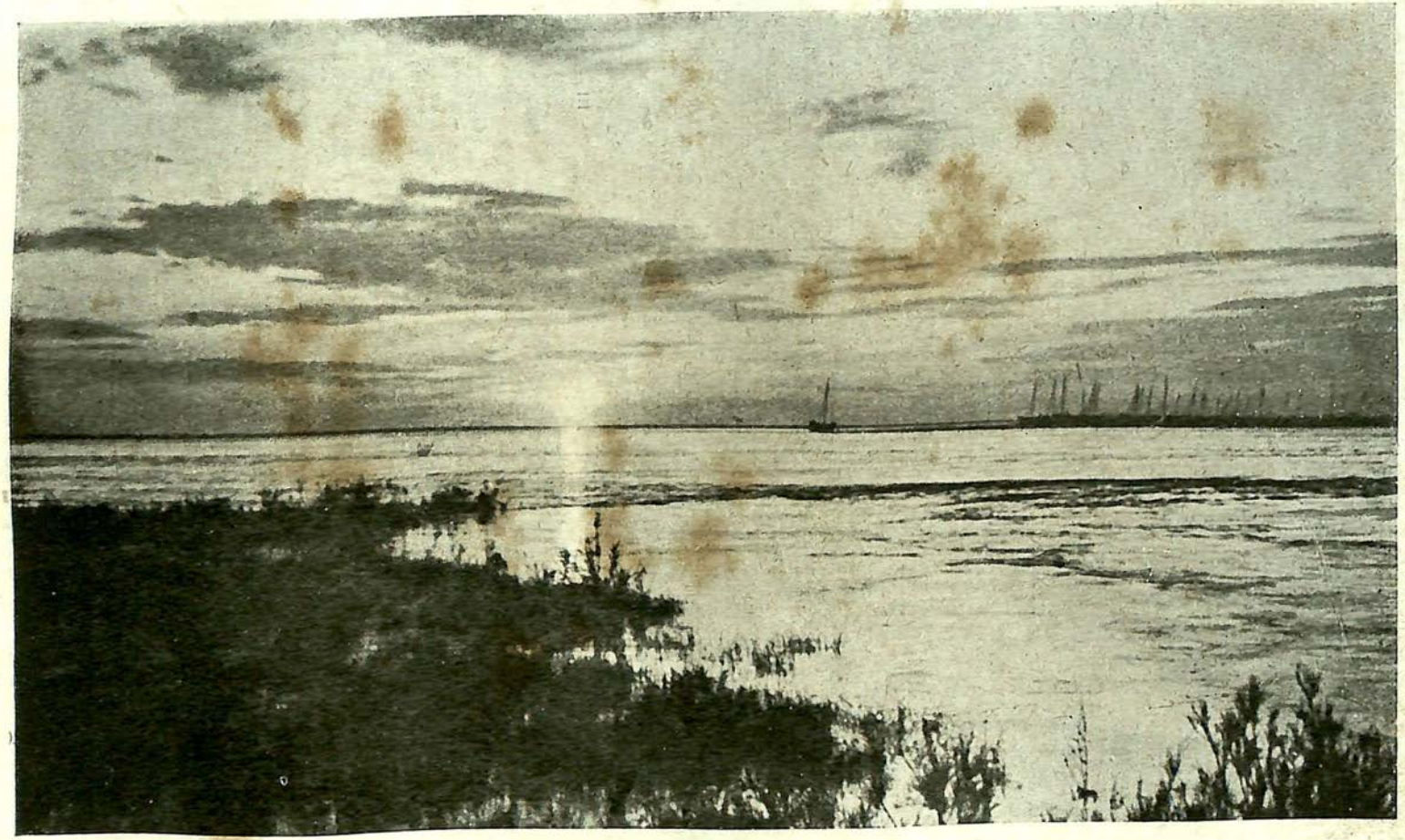
months we had been sapping up to the Turks' position. We had dug a labyrinth of trenches, sixteen miles of trench-and-sap work. At last we were within a hundred yards of his first line, ready for a spring at close quarters, with all our guns trained on, when out he slips the night before the attack and lies up for us again on a plain as flat as Sheikh Saad. Somewhere, we knew, not very far ahead, in that flat, featureless, innocent-looking ground between the marsh and the river there were Turkish heads concealed.

We had not long to wait before we drew their fire. Three miles behind the El Hannah position the Turkish communication trenches continued in a line of defences parallel with the river, with flanking trenches splayed out north and south. This was known as the Falahiyeh position, and it was here the enemy made his next stand. When the 40th Brigade, who were leading, came under heavy rifle and machine-gun fire at a thousand yards they did the wise thing. They dug themselves in and waited for dark. Then we made a night attack and rushed the position. Aeroplane reconnaissances had reported that the Turk was strongly reinforcing his entrenchments both at Falahiyeh and Sannaiyat, 6,000 and 12,000 yards from the front trenches at El Hannah.

It was refreshing for us who were being "strafed" by stray bullets and the tail end of a machine gun to hear the Brigadier's confident voice at the telephone: "No—run up against them—flat as a billiard table—better call up the 38th and 39th Brigades—go in to-night and clear them out—our men will be tired—need a rest—the 7th Division can come up and carry on."

They did go in and clear them out, and it was done cleanly, without doubt or hesitation, like the voice of the General at the telephone who recommended the operations.

The 38th and 39th Brigades made the assault at



THE TIGRIS, EL HANNAH, ON THE NIGHT OF APRIL 5th. MAHAILAS IN THE DISTANCE.

7.45 P.M., after a bombardment which began it at seven. Looking at the position the next morning, one could see that our artillery fire was a bit short. The Turks hung on doggedly and waited for the bayonet. The Worcesters took a machine gun. The officer manning it held on to the last. A long swathe of our dead lay in front, the men nearest it were riddled with bullets, but our wave never broke. We pushed right through and consolidated our line some eight hundred yards in advance of the line the Turks held. The casualties of the division during the day, including the slight losses at El Hannah, were 1,912.

The field at Falahiyeh next morning was one of the saddest sights I have seen. Men who last year had been wheeling barrows, painting doors, singing in the choir, bringing round the milk, lay there a solid square of dead in this cursed alien mud. I shall never see a man asleep in a field again without thinking of them. I had a letter in my pocket from the wife of Private John H—— who was posted missing. "I hope, sir, I am not asking too much, but I am very anxious about my husband. I have two little boys, one he has never seen." The letter ended: "Yours in trouble, Mrs. H., The Cottage."

I had another letter from a mother who would not believe her son was dead. She kept seeing him in groups in the illustrated papers and sent me "his picture," and asked me to find him and beg him to write. Nearly every mail brought these sad letters from unhappy women at home. Sometimes they wrote asking for photographs of the graves. I would no doubt have a letter from the wife of one of these men, for to every stiff figure here some woman's thoughts would be turning. The picture of "The Cottage" rose in my mind, and the careworn face of a woman still waiting for news of Private John H——, missing since Sheikh Saad.

The nakedness of the scene added to the pity of it. Look out of your tent in the morning. It is a repulsive

landscape. Not even the clean challenging desert, nothing to inspire one. Only bleak emptiness to conquer. Dying well is easier on French soil, easiest for a Frenchman on his own soil. If an inch of British soil were invaded nothing would dull the sacramental gladness with which the Englishman would give his life to redeem it. But here it is not so easy. All the things one is fighting for are so far away. The cheering crowds at the railway stations, the garlanded trains in France, the bands, the bunting, the sympathy and admiration in women's eyes, houses and farms to defend like one's own, privet hedges, rose gardens, pigstyes, orchards, bakers' shops—in France these are things of yesterday, to-day, and perhaps of to-morrow. But here one seems eternally cut off. The long months drag on into years, and home is too remote to think of. One has seen one's friends buried and dug up and buried again in this ungrateful clay which we are larding with our blood, clay which offers no very comforting accommodation—if one is weak enough to think about such things—for a permanent resting-place. It is common at home, I believe, to think of our brave troops as sustained at all seasons by the kind of thrill which pulses through an audience when a great baritone is singing "There is only England." The atmosphere which consecrates suffering, the copybooks would tell us, is, or ought to be, wherever battle is. Unhappily thrills, inspirations, and enthusiasms have their term like everything else; grey mornings, and billets in the mud, kill them. The spiritual flame flickers after a time when the concrete eikon is taken away and mere animal needs assert themselves. At such hours the unmercurial Briton falls back upon a virtue which seldom deserts him—his sense of humour.

Through the long lane of dead the hospital orderlies are carrying other recumbent figures. One of them is surveying the world from his stretcher with a half-

amused philosophy. As he passes, he holds up a hand swathed in bandages, and calls out to a smiling but uncomprehending sepoy, "Hullo, Johnny, here's a little bit of Turkish delight."

It is a pity that the Turk cannot inspire the stimulus of passion that the soil denies; but he is merely an accidental foe, and we cannot whip up any serious resentment against him.

The 13th Division had covered itself with glory when fighting the Turk in Gallipoli. It was the 6th Loyal North Lancashires and the 5th Wiltshires who held the heights at Chunuk Bair. On August 10th they were attacked by the Turks in enormous force. "The North Lancashire men," Sir Ian Hamilton wrote in his dispatch, "were simply overwhelmed in their shallow trenches by sheer weight of numbers, while the Wilts, who were caught out in the open, were literally almost annihilated. There arose a conflict so deadly that it may be considered as the climax of the four days' fighting for the ridge. The Turks came on again and again, fighting magnificently, calling upon the name of God. Our men stood to it and maintained by many a deed of daring the old traditions of their race. There was no flinching. They died in the ranks where they stood."[1]

They were a cool, hard, determined-looking breed, well seasoned now, and burnt to the complexion of Gurkhas. Yet the few survivors of Gallipoli were veterans among them. Officers, jealous of the divisional honour, explained, "We have lost most of the old crowd. These are all new drafts. They haven't had the training yet."

[1] "The 13th Division, under Major-General Shaw, had alone lost 6,000 men out of a grand total of 10,500. Baldwin (commanding the 38th Brigade) was gone and all his staff. Ten commanding officers out of thirteen had disappeared from the fighting effectives. The Warwicks and Worcesters had lost every single officer. The old German notion that no unit would stand a loss of more than 25 per cent. had been completely disproved. The 13th Division had lost more than twice that proportion, and in spirit was game for as much more fighting as might be required."—General Ian Hamilton's Dispatch.

But they had the doggedness and *élan* of the Regulars at Falahiyeh, if not the smartness and discipline. A sergeant in the Black Watch confided in me his misgivings about the new style. "They fight all right," he said, "but the Army is getting too democratic." On my way back to camp I looked in on a battalion of the 13th. Remembering Sergeant Macnabb's criticisms, I smiled when my friend, emerging from his tent, called out to one of his men who was busy cleaning his rifle:

"Corporal Smith, would you hold this officer's horse?" Corporal Smith, still on the ground, one hand occupied with the rifle, holds out the other for the rein, and with a twinkle in his eye, asks, "Does he bite, sir?" As much as to say; "I don't mind lending you a hand, so long as you are quite sure the animal is not vicious."

Other men, other manners. Bad manners, perhaps, judged by the Macnabb standard, but certainly good men.

Two nights afterwards I saw the division file past in the dark in column of fours with the ambulances behind, not a sound save the tread of feet muffled in the mud. There was a grim certainty of death for one in every four —wounds for one in every two. But it was to save Kut, which had become a kind of super-Moloch to whom regiments were devoted whole in extenuation of blind errors in the past. We were far committed now on the decline towards that catastrophe which must ensue when politics and sentiment override military considerations. Nothing else could be done. One great cry drowned all other voices: "Moloch must be fed."

Tired out with a day and a night in the open, we turned into our tents and lay awake miserably, waiting for the sounds which would tell us that the 13th Division were at grips again with the Turk.

To return to the night of the 5th. It was decided to push straight on and not to let the Turks rest. They were making their next stand at Sannaiyat—it was

believed in greater force than at Falahiyeh. Here they held three lines of trenches, all, as in the case of El Hannah, with their flanks resting on the river and the marsh. The communication trench from El Hannah ran right up to the position. But it was built for defence, and being quite straight and swept by machine-gun fire, it was the most dangerous line of approach.

What we believed at the time to be the real obstacle, the crux of everything, and the key of Kut, lay six miles behind in the defences of the Sinn position which the Turks had been building up for months. To force this was reserved for the 13th Division; they were less war-worn than the others, as they had not been engaged since Gallipoli until this action at El Hannah. Thus the 7th Division, less the 21st Brigade, was detailed for Sannaiyat. This, we believed, was the lighter task. The Turks had been severely handled in the night, and it was possible that they would not make another serious stand before Sinn.

The gallant and ill-fated 7th came up to relieve the 13th at night. They were advancing in the dark in preparatory formation when they came upon Kitchener's men, some returning in battalions, others, tired and beat like dead men, lying in the position they had taken. They had to form column of route again, and were delayed nearly an hour. Then they lost the track, and found themselves stumbling through a network of trenches. This held them back again; they could not get their machine guns through in the dark, and they had to leave them behind. At 4.30, the hour given for the attack, they were still far from the enemy's position. At 5.30, when they were within 800 yards of the Turkish line, it had become light. The Turks could see them plainly, though their own trenches were hidden. They held their fire until the brigade was within 700 yards, and then poured in one solid sheet

of lead. We advanced through this for 200 yards, and then fell back and dug ourselves in.

The gallant, broken, and patched-up battalions of the 7th Division, the remnants of Sheikh Saad, the Wadi, and El Hannah, were called upon once more to illustrate the impossible, to advance in broad daylight on an entrenched position without gun preparation over a perfectly open plain. Even their machine guns were wanting. One had fondly hoped that their thin ranks would not be thinned again. But the Sinn garrison had come out and held Sannaiyat in force, the rising marsh gave them a stronger natural position than the one they had prepared behind. It would have been better if the attack had been postponed till dark, or if a halt had been made until the guns could be brought up. But the General Commanding acted strictly upon orders, and the brigade was committed to the advance at all costs. The Turks ought to have been on the run, in which case it would have been criminal not to press the advantage home. Eleven hundred in the 28th Brigade alone fell in the first few minutes, and 700 in the 19th Brigade on the left. When they came under the enemy's fire, part of the line had not even deployed. The Oxfords lost 13 officers, the Leicesters 11, the 51st Sikhs 8, the Highland Battalion (Black Watch and Seaforths) 11. It was a torrent of death. The 51st Sikhs and Oxfords and Bucks Light Infantry were leading, the Leicesters in the second line, the 53rd Sikhs and 56th Rifles behind them. A Staff officer handed me his glasses.

"Do you see that line of khaki," he asked, "about five hundred yards from the enemy?"

"Yes. Why haven't they dug themselves in?"

He explained that they were our dead.

The dead were happy. It was the thought of the wounded that saddened me. Many of them would be

hit again, and many killed, before night fell and they could be brought in; and those days of battle which begin with a night march drag themselves out in interminably long hours even for a sound man. On the marsh side the gale had brought the flood up to the field where the wounded lay.

On the next day, April 7th, the division again lost heavily. It was understood that nothing would be done till dark, but in the morning the remaining brigade (21st) was brought up in support and the line was extended to the river. The orders were, "Advance as far as possible and dig in without committing yourselves." The brigade advanced all day, supported by intermittent bombardments, and dug themselves in within 700 yards of the enemy. The whole area was swept by bullets. The casualties were heaviest among the 125th Napier's Rifles. The regiment lost 61 per cent. of their effectives. The O.C. fell among the first; the next senior officer was hit before the message reached him that he was in command; and the third man on whom the command fell was down before he had given an order. Walking was insalubrious anywhere within 2,000 yards of the enemy's trenches. An R.A.M.C. orderly explained to me how his ambulance became inoperative, since they spent the whole of the day bringing each other in.

"It was laughable, sir," said this genial barber of Piccadilly; "whenever we got a move on we had to stop and pick one of our own up. I was the only one who wasn't 'it.'"

The tragic part of it was that the advance might have been made at night with a fifth of the loss. As it was, we pushed forward 200 yards after dark with few further casualties. A Staff officer described the day's work as a "demonstration"—a word which, from the subordinate officer's point of view, is the worst in the dictionary. "It generally means," a brigadier ex-

plained, "that you get it in the neck without getting any of your own back." There must, of course, have been some compensating gain, some underlying purpose, in all this human wastage, but no one had the courage to ask the higher command what it was. The "demonstration," we concluded, was in connection with projected operations on the other bank.

On the 6th and the 7th, 2,650 men were frittered away in an attack by daylight and while they were digging themselves in in front of the enemy's line. If we had brought these brigades up at night and thrown them in with the 13th Division in this assault on the 9th, the two divisions would probably have carried the position.

At nine at night (April 7th) we bombarded the enemy's trenches. The Turks opened rapid fire and sent up Vérey lights all along the line. We, instead of attacking, lay low. Then a moment afterwards our guns opened on them again when they were manning their parapets waiting for our infantry. It must have been an unpleasant surprise. In the meanwhile they had disclosed their dispositions. The plan of operations was kept very dark; but there seemed to us at the time only one way to explain these tactics: the object was to keep the enemy on the left bank while the 13th Division crossed over and threw in the weight of the attack on the right. A bridge was being rapidly thrown across the river, but on the morning of the 8th it was not finished, and the ground on the other side had become a swamp. Surprise would have been impossible, for the Turks must have gathered that we were bluffing and demonstrating with our forces advancing in the open and our bombardment which was not followed up. The only thing now was the super-bluff, or bluff in the second degree—to turn what we had intended as a feint into the real thing at a moment when they were persuaded it was a ruse. A subtlety that, if it were intended, was forced upon us.

On the morning of April 9th the 13th Division delivered the second attack on the Sannaiyat position. There is little in the action that needs to be described. It was a repetition of an old tale; only we had more striking power close up to the enemy's trenches, and there was a moment when it seemed the tide might turn. It was a good night march. The three brigades deployed silently and fell into their positions in perfect order. At 4.30 they went forward at a slow march to the assault. The enemy held back their fire till 4.29, when they sent up a Vérey light. The Turks were ahead of us with these flares, and lit up the whole place like day. This was the moment of the attack. Some of the Wiltshires, the Welsh Fusiliers, the King's Own and the North Lancashires got in; a mere handful of them returned.

There were three strong lines of trenches at Sannaiyat, the second seventy-five yards in rear of the first, the third 125 yards behind that. Our first and second lines were to take the first trench; our third and fourth, to go through them and hold the second; our fifth and sixth, the third. But the aeroplanes had brought back photographs of another line, a labyrinth of dug-outs which looked like reptiles with their tentacles fast in the firing trench. "Snake-pits," we called them. These were cunningly contrived bombing chambers, and the Turks slipped back into them and, as we rushed the trench, met our thin line with a shower of grenades from hidden positions which we could not locate. In the meanwhile the second line held back under the appalling punishment to which they were exposed. They did not make good. It was one of those collective shocks of recoil which sometimes, more especially in a night attack, paralyse the best troops in the world. Men who have not been tested in the same way cannot condemn these failures; all they can do is to salute humbly the spirits that rise to the ordeal.

Our casualties were estimated at 1,600-1,700, making 3,600 out of the 13th Division in the two actions of Falahiyeh and Sannaiyat, including the slight losses at El Hannah, or some 46 per cent. of the actual troops engaged. At the start the infantry of the three brigades were between 8,000 and 9,000 strong. In addition to these there was the divisional battalion of Welsh Pioneers.

As in the January operations, so now in April, the elements held back their forces until the critical moment, and then released them with the most devastating violence. In the good old Armada days the god of storms was on our side. Now he played into the hands of the Turk. One could read a calculated malice in his designs which would have cowed the superstitious. All these days we had the Tigris and the marsh to fight as well as the Turk, and our troops were exhausted with building up bunds to keep off the flood. The Tigris rises or falls with the melting of the snows in the north; the marsh approaches or recedes according to changes in the wind. On the 6th, operations on the left bank were hampered by the overflowing of the marsh. On the right bank the trenches evacuated by the Turks at Abu Roman were flooded by the rise in the river, and our firing line was cut off from our base. On the night of the 11th we were visited by a thunderstorm of extraordinary violence, and on the afternoon of the 12th we had a waterspout, a hail-storm, and a hurricane. The spray was leaping 4 ft. high in the Tigris on our left; and on our right the Suwacha Marsh threatened to come in and join the river and flood our camp. We watched the yellow waves rising above the level of our tents, and the bund built by the Turks and strengthened by the sappers and pioneers would not have saved us had not the wind suddenly veered. At sunset it broke into our forward trenches and the Turkish position facing them, a wave of water

coming over the bund like a wall, swamping kit, rations, and entrenching tools. Some of the brigade on our right had to swim.

The Turks were in the same plight as ourselves. A sudden violent fusillade or artillery bombardment signified that we, or the enemy, or both, were being flooded out of our trenches and offered a temporary target. On the 12th the Seaforths got their machine guns into the Turks and mowed down some 200. They were heartened to see them driven into the open at last in the light of day. Then just before dark the wind died down, the marsh receded, and everything was quiet. Our own and the Turkish line of front, temporarily shortened, were lengthened out again.

These violent disturbances were normal. It is a country of excess. The weather is seldom moderate. A storm may be followed by a day of tropical heat, so that there is a difference sometimes of 40 degrees between the temperature of day and night.

For the time being our narrow water-logged front at Sannaiyat became a recognised impasse, and our thrust was transferred to the south bank.

CHAPTER XVI

BEIT AIEESA

AFTER the two unsuccessful attacks on Sannaiyat the 7th Division was left to hold the line between the river and the marsh, and the next thrust was made on the right bank. Here there was a network of trenches and pickets to clear, as well as the two complicated lines of Beit Aieesa and Chahela, before we could advance on the main position at Sinn. Operations were impeded by swamps, and the Turks, with their command of the river, could control inundations. Flood water became their most effective rearguard, and there was always the danger of their letting in the Tigris behind us, cutting off our communications and leaving us in the air. That is why we were pinned down to the river bank and could not strike direct at Sinn Aftar or the Dujaila Redoubt. At one time our firing line beyond Abu Roman was cut off from the rear, and supplies had to be brought up the river in *mahailas* at night, while the sappers were building up the bund and making a road.

The advance began on this bank, after the long check at Orah, with the occupation of Abu Roman, which was simultaneous with the capture of the El Hannah position and Falahiyeh. The enemy's trenches and our own had been continuous here, separated by a double block on the flank. The Turks held the riverside on our right. On the night of April 5th, when we broke through El Hannah, they evacuated. Our progress after that was gradual, interrupted by storms and floods, and carried through by a succession of small actions in which the

Turks were driven back on their prepared position at Beit Aieesa. Owing to the swampy nature of the ground, observation was difficult, and the movement of large bodies of troops impossible. There were many brilliant little affairs of outposts which in earlier campaigns would have been written in brass, but which in this, being events of the everyday routine, will have no record. Individual enterprise and initiative had full scope; and endurance was tested to its human limits. The hardships of these weeks, when we were often fighting in water with no dry place for a bivouac, are not easily realised. And through it all the sappers and pioneers were fighting the flood, day and night, with little rest.

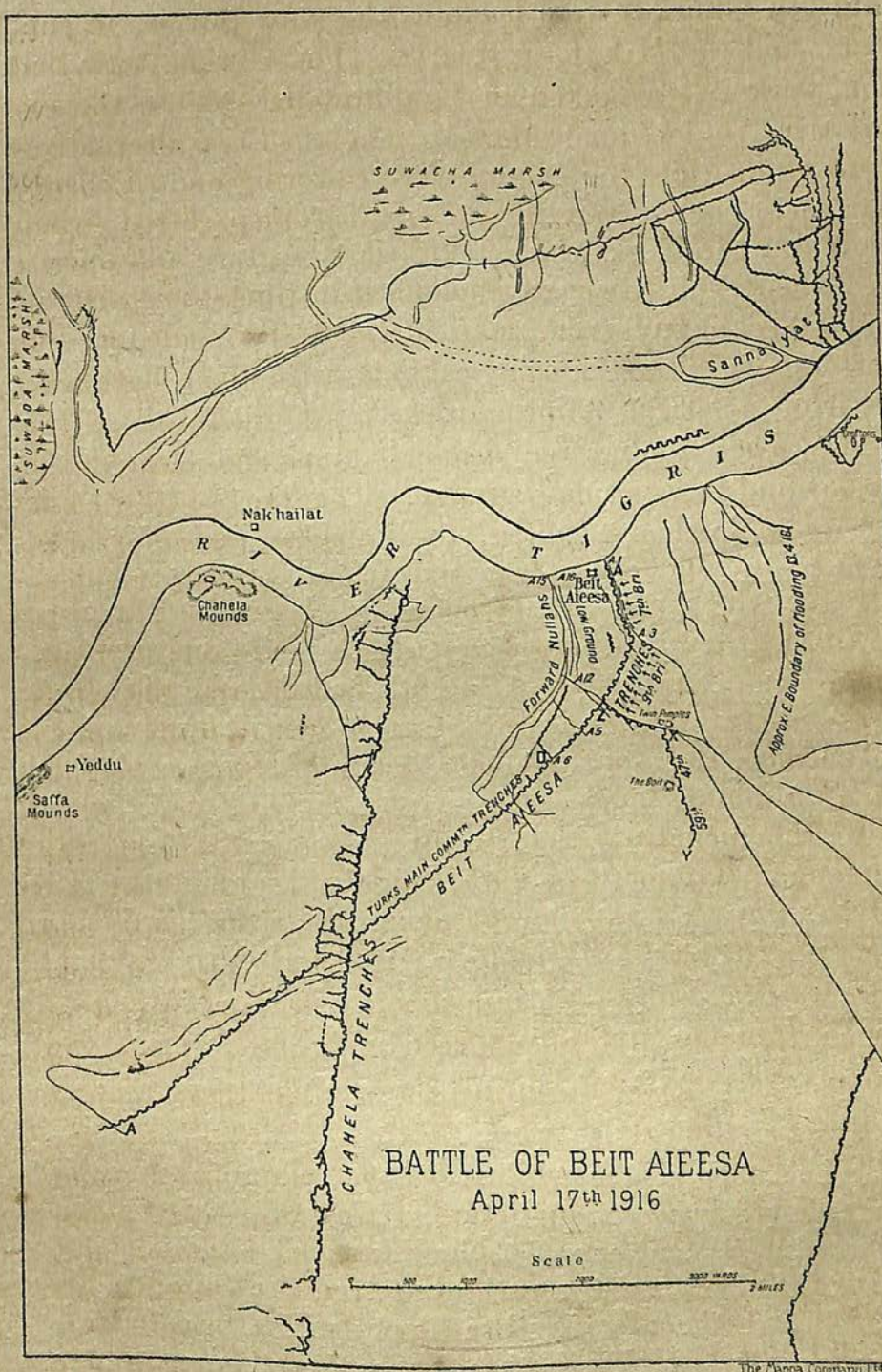
We gained our first footing at Beit Aieesa on April 15th, when we captured the outworks at dawn after an advance in a violent thunderstorm through a swamp. On the 17th we took the position. I was with the 8th Brigade in the morning. The 7th and 9th Brigades were detailed for the attack. We were to come up before dawn and hold the trenches X, Y, when they went forward. Only our guide lost himself in the night march, and we spent many miserable hours making slow circles in the swamp, or standing erect for want of anywhere to sit, and meditating the cussedness of things. When we reached Rhodes picket the sun was rising, and this meant that we had 1,500 yards to advance in broad daylight to reach our trenches. We waited for the bombardment and got through with very few casualties. As we advanced we could see that the attack was going well. The 9th Brigade was in the enemy's trenches before the bombardment lifted; the 7th on their right immediately after. The Turks kept their heads down, and were evidently taken by surprise. We had come up quietly in the night, and they could not have been prepared for an attack by three brigades. In the 9th Brigade the 1st

and 9th Ghurkas were leading, the 93rd Burmas in support, and the H.L.I. in reserve. The Gurkhas saw that the Turks were shaken or "gobrowed," to use the expressive Anglo-Indian phrase. They had two alternatives —to go in while the enemy were cowering and to chance our shells, or to wait till the bombardment lifted, when no doubt the Turk would take heart of grace and open a fusillade. With true psychological instinct they went in and killed nearly every man in the trench, cutting and slashing with their kukris, jabbing with their bayonets, or firing a charge pointblank to finish the work of the steel. They took three machine guns and cleared the second line with similar carnage. The Turkish third line rose in a cloud and bolted, the Gurkhas pursuing until they found themselves on the fringe of our artillery barrage, which had lifted 500 yards at 7.30. Here, to crown all, they captured two Turkish field guns. Meanwhile, a bombing party of the 9th had cleared 500 yards of the main communication trench which leads up to the Chahela position and held it while a sapper section put up a double block.[1]

In the meantime the 7th Brigade on the right, the Connaught Rangers and 89th Punjabis leading, had carried the line A1, A3, swept along the river bank, and taken up the forward channels A15 and A16, to hold which was the limit of our objective. The Turks stood up in their trenches and surrendered in groups. Over 300 prisoners were taken during the day and another hundred at night.

Beit Aieesa was certainly a day of reckoning; I could read it in the faces of our men. I was amused to come upon the little Gurkhas with blood on their bayonets and clothes running up and down the trench, bringing up ammunition and carrying baskets of bombs, happy and keen and busy as ferrets. I had never seen them so much

[1] A6 in the map.


SUWACHA MARSH
Sanna yat
TIGRIS
RIVER
Nakhailat
Chahela Mounds
Yeddu
Saffa Mounds
Beit Aieesa
Forward Nullahs
Approx. E. Boundary of flooding 17th
TURKS MAIN COMM.TH TRENCHES
BEIT AIEESA
CHAHELA TRENCHES
BATTLE OF BEIT AIEESA
April 17th 1916
Scale
The Mappa Company Ltd

at home. The Turks were a couple of hundred yards down, where the sappers had built the double block, removing the traverses and leaving a clear field of fifty yards covered by our fire. Into this, and beyond it, the young blood of Nepal would have been irresistibly drawn but for disciplinary restraint. Caution is not an infirmity of the Gurkha temperament. "Little blighters," I heard a Sikh company officer say, "they're always scurrying on miles ahead, and if you don't look after them they will make a big salient and bite off more than they can chew." Words to be fulfilled in literal earnest within a few hours; only the salient was ready made for them, and it was not their fault that they had precisely this point in the line to hold.

I had never seen so many dead Turks. They choked the trench, and groups of them had been lifted out and dumped on the grass on one side to make room. They had all been clubbed or bayoneted, and the gaping holes in their anatomy were eloquent of the vigour of the attack. There was a wounded man lying among a heap of dead, with a bayonet groove on his skull which ought to have killed him. He was an obscene-looking Mosul Arab, and he fixed me with a sickly, ingratiating smile, mechanically contrived with a movement of his lips and the whites of his eyes. He pointed feebly to his mouth asking for water, and I was surprised that I felt no pity for him. Instead of pity I felt anger.[1] He would have mutilated me had I been in his place. For months men of the same brutal type of face had been killing my friends, some of the whitest men on earth. There is a sickening disproportion between the worth of what one of our bullets and one of theirs destroys. Looking at the man, I understood the ruthlessness of the bayonet.

During the morning the Turks rallied and launched two counter-attacks; both were easily repulsed. I was

[1] I am speaking of the Tigris Arab, not of the Turk.

somewhere in the neighbourhood of A12 at the time, but saw nothing of it, and heard only vague rumours until I got back to the 8th Brigade Headquarters at Rhodes Picket, where the Staff had been watching the affair as from a front seat in the stalls. They told me how the Turkish officers exposed themselves gallantly, urging the men on; but the heart and back of their 35th Division were broken. One sees very little of a battle at close quarters unless one is actually taking part in the assault. It is difficult to get the hang of what is going on, and the geography of Beit Aieesa was puzzling to a degree. The Turks were in the same trench as the Gurkhas with whom I had been talking a moment before, only they dared not lift a head above that double block. I saw groups of our men running forward and taking cover, where I did not suspect any enemy; or standing casually against the sky-line where one would have thought exposure must mean sudden death. Then the shells would begin to search the field where one lay flat in the trefoil, as if the Turkish gunners had chosen this peculiarly inoffensive corner to sweep clean. The shrapnel drew in closer until one felt that the next must drop plumb on one's squatting hole. One waited for it, but no more came, and for half an hour there would be peace—a peace in which continued existence seemed a personal boon, and one spent it contentedly watching the colour on a dragonfly's wing.

Looking up, I saw a rifle supported by a bayonet stuck in the ground, a signal of the wounded. I made for it and found the man dead. The same shell had killed a sapper messenger who lay on his back clasping a field message block. Farther back the dead were thicker. The wonder is that there is so much room between enemy missiles, that they make so wide a mesh. The human frame fills a very small space in the landscape. This is one of the few surprises war has for the uninitiated. In nearly every new experience there is some element of

unexpectedness. The reality is different from the picture. But my impression of the first civilised battle I was in was that everything was exactly what I had expected. The sights and sounds and sensations were familiar though new. And nothing is more tedious to describe than a battle. The gallantry of the attack, the doggedness of the defence, the hail of bullets, the wind of the shrapnel, the swathes of dead, are an oft-repeated tale; and there is more variety of interest in a well-told story of a village cricket match or a run with the hounds.

But the sameness of this Mesopotamian fighting was to be interrupted that night with a vengeance. We had hardly expected a determined counter-attack. So far it had not suited the Turk's book, and he had shown no initiative in the offensive since our retirement from Ctesiphon. Prisoners explained that now he had lost a key to his main position it had become necessary to drive us from the door. Also we heard it was rumoured in the Turkish camp that Kut could only hold out for a few days, and they argued that if once we got a footing in Sinn we would stick at nothing, and it would be better to break the head of the ram before he butted. A more probable reason for their change of tactics was that to hold the river bank meant control of inundation, and it was their game to let the flood in behind us if we made a move south on Sinn Aftar or the Dujaila Redoubt. In any case the Turk is no fool, and he could not have chosen a better moment to attack. With the marsh at our back, and "the Narrows," the one bridge across it, in our line of retreat, we should have been in a tight place if he had broken through all along the line and fallen on our guns.

The Turks did not rely on a surprise. Their plan was to pour in masses of troops and to carry the position by sheer weight of numbers. Twelve battalions took part in the attack with the best part of a division in reserve. Half the garrison of Sinn was brought up, and the assault

was launched by the famous 2nd Division of Constantinople, veterans of the Balkan War, our opponents in Gallipoli, and generally reckoned the pick of the Turkish Army. The attack opened with a bombardment, but the first notice we had of them was from the 59th Rifles (Y), who reported a large hostile force moving north-east from the direction of the Sinn Aftar redoubt. This was confirmed by the gunner observation post. Then the 9th Gurkhas reported to the 47th Sikhs that they could see the Turks forming for an attack which apparently was going to be launched at the trench (X, Y) the 59th Rifles and 47th Sikhs were holding. The first assault, however, was delivered just south of D, where the Gurkhas held a salient opposite the two captured field guns. These were like a kill put out for a leopard, only they drew the game on to the hunter.

The Gurkhas had got up drag ropes to bring the guns in after dark, and were bridging the trench when the assault was made. The Turks first rushed the picket and then attacked in mass with bombs. The Gurkhas held out for about twenty minutes, but they could not get ammunition round quick enough, and the Turks were in among them soon after dark. When the line gave the enemy bombed up the main (A) and parallel trenches towards the 7th Brigade, while a mass of them crossed the open in the direction of the Twin Pimples. Behind the line all was confusion. Somebody said it reminded him of a crowd after a football match on a ground where there were two or three gates. It was the most promiscuous mêlée. The killing was done with bayonets, rifle butts and revolvers. The Turks had exhausted their bombs, and here we had them at a disadvantage, but it was difficult to tell who was who. One dared not shoot. An immense Sikh, a subadar of the 93rd Burmans, caught his Turk by the throat, forced him to the ground, stood on his neck and shot him through the head with his revolver. It was the

greatcoat that proclaimed the infidel, and the absence of turban or helmet. A subaltern was walking by the side of a man he thought was a sepoy when he noticed that he was wearing a cap. The fellow had no doubt blundered into the wrong crowd, and, seeing the odds were against him, was waiting for the chance of an inconspicuous change of *milieu* when his companion of the march quietly drew his revolver and shot him without changing his step.

The extraordinary thing was that we had so few casualties. General Campbell, commanding the 9th Brigade, had collected every rifle he could find, and he and his brigade major and Staff captain with some officers on the spot had pushed up at the first alarm to make a stand at the Twin Pimples, where they were rallying the broken line. There was a definite psychological moment, into which entered three elements of alarm for the Turk. First, a salvo of fire from the few rifles we had collected there; then a loud cheer out of the darkness behind, a disciplined and far from spontaneous cheer; and thirdly, a couple of shells which burst just over our heads into the brown. Some inspired field gunners in the direction of the marsh had chosen this moment to fire these chance shots, and the Providence that holds the scales in battle leant our way. The wind of the first shell nearly blew the helmet off the Staff captain's head. It was too much for the Turks. They began to form and retire. They had been advancing tentatively, bludgeoning and bayoneting everyone they met, but firing very little. No doubt before they ran up against our improvised line they were feeling very much "in the blue," and their failure to drive the thrust home illustrates the futility of a night attack with an ill-defined objective. The attacking party, even when in greatly superior numbers, is at a disadvantage behind the enemy's line, unless it can create a panic. This the Turks failed to do. In the meanwhile we

received reinforcements from the 13th Division. Before ten o'clock two battalions of the 38th Brigade were sent up to join the 9th Brigade. They came across the marsh and arrived within two hours of the report of the attack. Half a battalion of the South Lancashires bombed down trench X to the right of the 47th Sikhs, and joined up the line. The other half battalion bombed down the trench connecting X and A and built a barricade. They killed eighty of the enemy, and among them a German officer. In a few hours our original line was restored. Our casualties, including the attack in the morning when we captured the position, were insignificant compared to the enemy's. The 9th Brigade lost 550; the 7th Brigade 600; and the 8th, who must have killed at least 1,500 Turks, a bare 120 killed and wounded.

To turn to the 8th Brigade, who held the line on our left flank. Assault after assault was launched on them, six distinct attacks in mass before three o'clock, as well as sporadic rushes. But they never yielded an inch through the whole night. Acting on the first hint of the attack, the Staff captain had sent for more ammunition; this new supply came in the nick of time. Every man who could hold a rifle, clerks, signallers, orderlies, was sent to the firing line to hold the parapet until the attack had failed. Even the ammunition bearers were ordered to stay in the trench and to eke out the thin line. The two battalions of 59th Rifles and 47th Sikhs, who held this line, were a bare 800 rifles. To these were added during the night, to fill gaps in the line and to extend it to the left, two battalions of the 40th Brigade who had come to reinforce the 9th, 100 rifles of the 2nd Rajputs held in reserve, and a company of the Manchesters. It was the Manchesters and the 47th Sikhs who blocked and held the north end of the trench X, and saved the right of the brigade, which was at one time in extreme danger. The enemy were coming on thickly here. Had they broken

through, transport, guns, and Brigade Headquarters might have been lost.

The main attack concentrated south of X on the trench held by the 47th Sikhs and 59th Rifles. It was here that the six assaults in mass were repulsed. The Turkish bombers came within twenty yards of the trench. Behind them were rifles lying up in little snipers' pits and keeping up a continual fire through the night. In the bright moonlight the Turks could be seen at 500 yards. We opened fire on them at too long a range, for these splendid regiments had lost most of their old campaigners and were made up of young recruits, brave to a fault, but impetuous. Had they held their fire, the execution would have been greater, the expenditure of ammunition less. Brigade Headquarters were in communication with No. 23 Mountain Battery, which had been brought up to within 3,000 yards, and the 47th Sikhs were able to register for the gunners to a nicety. The first shells fell over; then, as the range shortened, the shrapnel found them. The flash of the burst disclosed the Turks lying flat, and we poured in a fusillade at ground level. Then a message went through to the C.R.A., and a howitzer battery swept the area. Fifteen hundred dead were counted in the morning opposite this one brigade alone. Daylight disclosed bodies of Turks in the rear and on the flank of the position. These were lost; they missed their line of retreat, and in their confusion doubled back on to the line held by the 47th and 59th, and were all shot down or captured. The Turks were now retreating, and two machine guns which were covering their retirement were taken, with the officer and detachment, by the 47th Sikhs.

Meanwhile the 7th Brigade on the right flank held on, though the breaking through of the Turkish wave left them entirely in the air, with the enemy on their flank, front, and rear. A party of the Turks who had

broken the salient came bombing up the trench (A5, A3) right up to Brigade Headquarters. At this point they were met and driven back 150 yards, stubbornly contesting every traverse. In the meantime other bodies of the enemy were pressing up the forward nullahs towards the position the Connaught Rangers held on the river bank. The Rangers met them and bombed them back a hundred yards. While they held them here, others came round in the rear and more in the front. The Rangers, with the 27th Punjabis and 128th, manned both banks of the nullahs, got a machine gun down the trench, and swept the Turks as they came up. This flank of twenty-five yards became their front, on which the main fire of the enemy concentrated. They lost six officers here, but held their line. On the low ground behind them, between the nullahs and the main trench (A1 and A3), where Brigade Headquarters lay, there were confused rifle fire and sniping. Groups appeared and disappeared in the moonlight, and bullets came in thickly from this direction. But it was impossible to tell who was friend and who was foe. Over a blur which had seemed to be compact of Turkish greatcoats there would appear turbans; and just as we were going to let loose into the brown someone would cry, "For God's sake don't shoot; they are Sikhs!"

They held the forward nullah until 3.45. They could have held it until ammunition gave out, but daylight would have exposed their precarious position and invited disaster. They left snipers to hold the block in the nullah and retired, withdrawing their wounded, up to the river and along the bank to the trench (A1, A3), which they manned and held until the division was relieved. It was largely the coolness of the 7th Brigade which turned what might have been a reverse into a memorable victory. In the morning we were holding the trenches we had taken from the enemy the day before. The only ground lost was the forward nullahs, and the Turkish losses during

the day and night were estimated at 3,500 dead alone, wounded in proportion, and 400 prisoners.

A Sikh subadar, surveying the dead from his trench the next morning, expressed what was in all our minds. "Sahib," he said, "I hear the enemy are very numerous. May God put it into their heads to attack in this manner again. Thus they will become very few."

We killed more Turks at Beit Aieesa than at Sheikh Saad, The Wadi, El Orah, and Falahiyeh combined. And the repulse of the counter-attack at night was really a greater coup than the taking of the position in the morning, for it put out of action the best part of two Turkish divisions.

CHAPTER XVII

THE THIRD ATTACK ON SANNAIYAT

I SAW nothing of the third battle of Sannaiyat on April 22nd. I was with the 3rd Division at the time, well forward on the right bank near the Tower of Babel. On the night of the 21st I was getting some kit ready to cross over when a friend suggested a simpler way of seeing the action.

"Instead of getting up at three in the morning," he said, "and going ten miles round by the bridge, which will probably be shut—certainly for ponies—why not watch the scrap from the machine-gun battery this side?"

I argued that the machine-gun fire was indirect, and that I should see nothing.

"But you will get a fine view from the sandhills; there is no high ground on the other bank."

There was a great deal in my friend's argument. The sandhills were less than a mile from my tent, and the only natural eminence in the neighbourhood. Also the enemy's trenches at Sannaiyat were known to be flooded, and it was doubted if the Turks would put up any serious resistance; so I slept peacefully in my tent and made for the sandhills at 6.30 in the morning. We looked to Sinn for the next big stand.

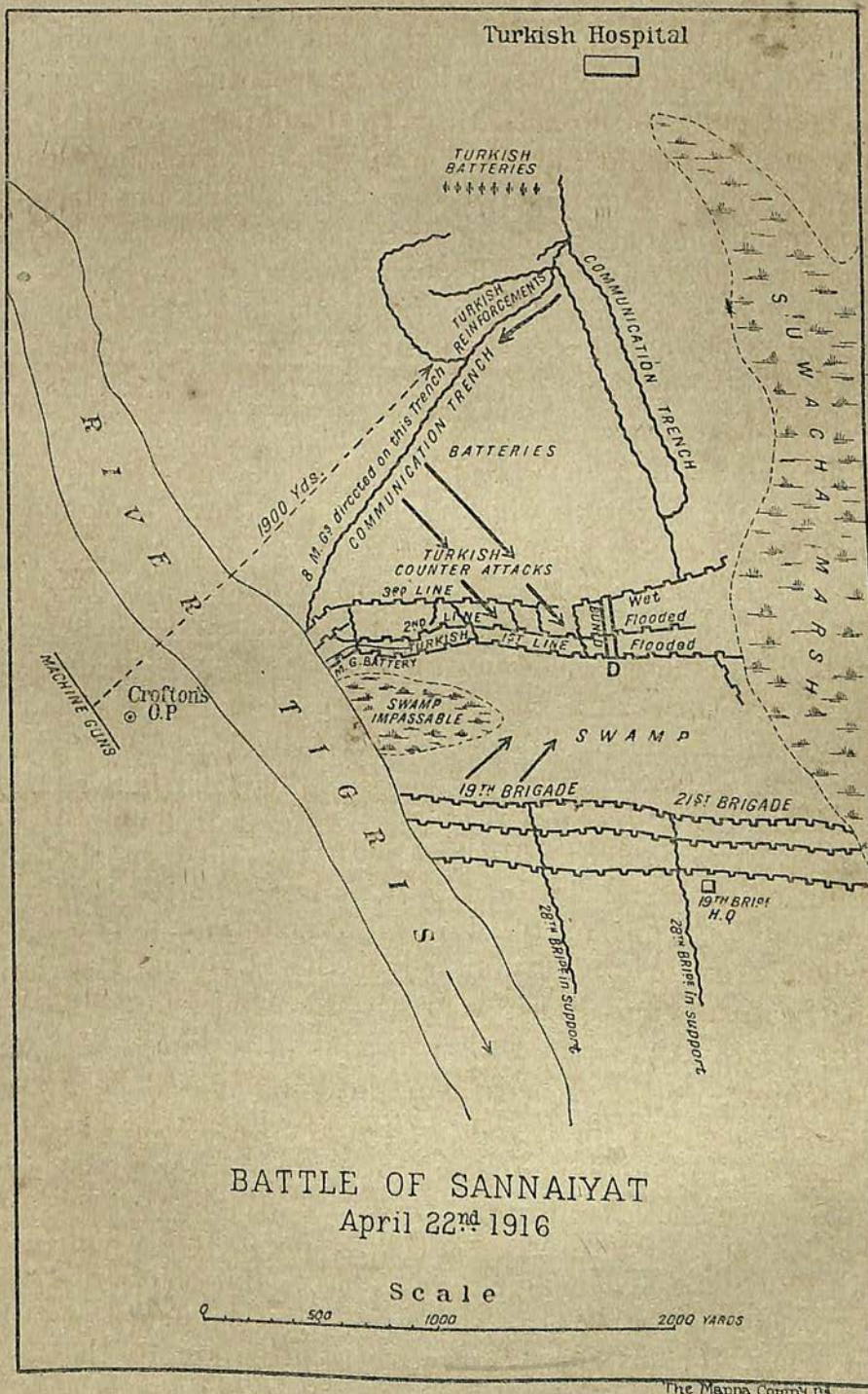
At first the bombardment obscured everything. Afterwards, what with the dust and the smoke and the glare and the distance, we could see very little. Only obscure figures moving indistinctly; and we could read no coherent action in it. The observation post was the

best point of vantage on the right bank, but every rung of it was occupied by men who were essential.

Had I gone to the 19th Brigade Headquarters on the other bank I should have had a view of the fighting at close quarters. But men who were there told me that it was as well that I did not go. What they saw is burnt into their minds and likely to recur to them, waking or sleeping, at all sorts of unseasonable hours. The morning of the 22nd was the most hopeless, tragic affair in the campaign; and it would have been almost indecent to have been an idle witness of it.

Our failure to relieve Kut has been charged to the floods. It is doubtful whether we could have broken through the Turkish ring on dry ground; the floods certainly offered an immense natural advantage to the enemy's defences. The vagaries of the marsh were incessant; it was always coming on and receding with the wind. On April 20th the water was clean across our front six inches deep, with another six inches of mud; on the 21st it was subsiding; on the 22nd the flooded ground was heavy but practicable. The 21st Brigade on the right were to have attacked with the 19th on the morning of the 22nd, but at 6 A.M. it was reported that the ground in front of them was impracticable. Thus the whole brunt of the assault fell on the Highland Battalion (Seaforths and Black Watch); the 92nd Punjabis, and the 125th Rifles and 28th Punjabis in support.

Listening posts had been sent out, and it had been discovered that the first and second Turkish trenches were very thinly held and deep in water. Aeroplane reconnaissance had confirmed this. Nevertheless we bombarded the first and second line along the whole front. Our guns began registering at six; the bombardment was opened at 6.25. The assault was launched at seven, when the artillery barrage was lifted on to the Turkish third line. The advance was so rapid that we


Turkish Hospital
TURKISH BATTERIES
TURKISH REINFORCEMENTS
COMMUNICATION TRENCH
COMMUNICATION TRENCH
BATTERIES
S U W A C H A M A R S H
1900 Yds.
8 M. G's directed on this Trench
TURKISH COUNTER ATTACKS
3RD LINE
2ND LINE
1ST LINE
TURKISH
Wet
Flooded
Flooded
MT G. BATTERY
D
SWAMP IMPASSABLE
SWAMP
MACHINE GUNS
Crofton's O.P
R I V E R
T I G R I S
19TH BRIGADE
21ST BRIGADE
19TH BRIGE H.Q
28TH BRIGE in support
28TH BRIGE in support
BATTLE OF SANNAIYAT
April 22nd 1916
Scale
500
1000
2000 YARDS
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were held up by our own artillery fire, and the Highlanders were seen waving their red flags furiously. The first line, as we expected, was flooded; there were no Turks in it; and it was not until we had passed it that we were really in difficulties. The second line of trenches was neck deep in water; behind it there was a network of dug-outs and pits into which we floundered blindly. Beyond this, between the Turkish second and third lines, the mud was knee deep. The Highlanders and the 92nd, as they struggled grimly through, came under a terrific fire. It was here that their splendid gallantry was mocked by one of those circumstances which make one look darkly for the hand of God in war. The breeches of their rifles had become choked and jammed with the mud. The Seaforths were tearing at them with their teeth, panting for breath, sobbing and choking with tears in their eyes. But they could not return the enemy's fire. They were almost at grips with the Turk. By every law of justice, through which effort is rewarded and sacrifice meets with its crown, they had earned, if not an open field to their goal, at least a narrow passage through which chivalry might force a way. But they were met with a blank, impenetrable wall. Nothing in life is more tragic than to witness the spirit of man brought up against a physical barrier like this—a barrier of negation to all ideals, shadowing an implacable Providence, matter callously omnipotent on a plane on which spirit should be supreme.

The Turks counter-attacked. They came in from their right and the river, inside the parapet of their third trench where the ground was not flooded, in the direction of the arrows on the map. Here they were on solid earth firing into our men, who, until they could come to grips with them, were unarmed struggling in the water and mud.

The supporting companies and the 19th Brigade

reserve came under very heavy machine-gun fire. Consequently our forward line got little support. The Norfolks and Dorsets ("Norsets") (21st Brigade) who had come up reached the flooded Turkish first line trench. They, too, suffered heavy loss. All the enemy's machine-gun fire came from a battery on the right of the river bank, which was screened from our own battery the other side of the Tigris.

To understand what happened one must consult the map. The Turks had a bund at D, on the river side of which their trenches were relatively dry; on the marsh side flooded. Our reconnaissances could never get close up to the enemy's lines on the river side. The Turks held them in strength, and at night poured in fire on our patrols, who could not approach without splashing, and were always diverted to the right of this swampy ground.

On the morning of the 22nd our attack, partly owing to the heavy ground on their left, partly through having no support on the right, swung off some 15 degrees to the north and came in at the wrong point on the right of the Turkish bund, where the trenches were flooded. The Turks who made the counter-attack were hidden from our troops on the same bank by the parapets of their first and second trenches. Only when they reached the bund and clambered over did they offer a mark. But there was a conspicuous figure on the sky line, an officer who stood on the parapet coolly waving his cane and calling his men on. From the observation post on the right bank the counter-attack was plainly visible. It was sporadic; there was no continuous line. Parties of fifty would jump up from the communication trench and rush across the open. They were apparently independent of each other. It is doubtful if they realised the nature of the zone through which they had to pass. Their line was quickly thinned; some thirty out of every batch of fifty would fall before they reached the bund.

Only from the right bank could one see the terrific havoc which our machine-gun batteries and artillery were making in the enemy's ranks. There were thirty-five machine guns with seven yards between each gun—and good head cover—clustered in a single battery behind Crofton's observation post. Two machine guns had been firing continuously for the last few days, so that it had been possible to register four guns at a time without giving the strength of the battery away. It was all indirect fire, controlled from a high central observation post by telephone, visual signalling, and officer orderlies; 165,000 rounds were fired between 6.58 A.M. and the hour of the truce; and there were targets all the while.

A glimpse of this holocaust would have cheered the 19th Brigade on the left bank, not that they wanted heartening so far as grit and courage went. Their rifles had jammed, and the Turks were within forty yards, but they still had bombs and bayonets left, and they believed the supports were coming up. When the word for retirement was given many would not retire.[1]

A Highland officer, a man who had risen from the ranks, reminded his men that they had their bayonets still and many stayed with him. He was seen to draw his revolver and drop a Turk at fifteen yards; then he fell. Others pressed on. They had passed a barrier beyond which certain appeals are not heard, and had come face to face with a challenge so remorseless, so insolent and crushing in its logic of "Dare and you must die," that their proud spirits would not yield. These are men to whom the mere implacability of circumstance more even than the provocation of fellow man makes it impossible to turn their backs.

The retirement was carried through with perfect calmness. The trenches the Turks had abandoned were

[1] The source of the order is not generally known. The officer who gave it fell during the retirement. He was not up with the original line of attack, and could not have been acquainted with the position.

untenable because of the water, and our artillery had battered them to pieces. So we fell back on to our original first line.

At 10 A.M. the Turks advanced with Red Crescent flags over the ground where they had made the counter-attack; we sent out an I.M.S. officer with a Red Cross flag to meet them, and an informal truce was arranged. All our wounded this side of this line were brought in. The Turks stripped our dead close to their trenches; otherwise they behaved well. The barbarities recorded at Sannaiyat were committed by the Huns. Here are some details I had from an officer at the time. I quote his own words:

"A German officer went about shooting the wounded and telling the Turks to kill them. He was blown to hell by one of our crumps. Afterwards a Turk apologised for him to our R.A.M.C. men. A Jock dressing a wounded man found a Turk removing his boots at the same time and gave him one of the best with the point. Two Turks were looting our dead when they found a bomb and began fiddling with it. I saw a party of Indian stretcher-bearers throw down their empty stretcher and tear away from the spot as hard as they could lick. One of the Turks had extracted the safety pin and was examining the bomb curiously. He and his pal were blown to bits. On the top of the explosion I saw two legs come down with boots attached. On the whole the Turks behaved very decently, and did nothing to which we could object."

I quote the following from a letter written to me by a Staff officer:

"The Jocks were magnificent, as they always are. So were some of the Indians. Here is an instance of the spirit of the troops. A Mussulman N.C.O. of the 125th Rifles (Bomb. Havildar, now Jemadar, Sher Khan) was hit through both jaws. He then got two bullets in

the arm. Then he was shot in the lungs. But it was only when he got his fifth wound in the leg that he ceased to lead his men and *walked* back to the first-aid post."

About no action in the whole campaign is there such diversity of opinion. I have accounts from officers of the 19th and 21st Brigades which are completely at variance. To observers on the left bank who saw the Highlanders and the 92nd staggering in the mud, water-logged, mown down in a bloody shambles and unable to return the enemy's fire, the affair appeared a hopeless impasse with no loophole in it for salvation, and the scene of the struggle seemed a kind of Nathan and Abiram pit to swallow whole battalions as they were sent up in detail. That more troops were not thrown in, showed that the position was considered hopeless.

To the men in the trenches the Turkish white flag incident seemed inexplicable. But to observers on the other side of the river to whom the terrible havoc among the Turks was visible it was our withdrawal which seemed inexplicable. It looked like a victory carelessly thrown away. They swear that the Turks were beaten, that our machine-gun and artillery fire had broken them, and that if we had thrown in supports we must have taken the position. When their flag of truce went up our maxims were still playing on them, and the tops of the parapets were flying up in dust; and it was entering hell fire for the Turk to expose himself in the third line trench, or in the long communication trench which ran obliquely from their position, or in the interval of ground between. From the very beginning a continuous and gradually increasing stream of Turkish wounded were seen retiring. These became so thick that observation officers at one time thought the enemy were breaking up in a body. The Turks' desire for a truce was intelligible enough. During and after the armistice, and throughout the whole

afternoon till dark, large parties were seen collecting their wounded.

There will always be two contradictory views about Sannaiyat. The general impression is that of a tragic impasse, hopeless physical odds in which the flood put its final veto on our undertaking. This is likely to be the tradition. Others are of opinion that a supporting brigade, pushed in over the enemy's first and second lines while they were held by the 19th Brigade, might have carried the Turkish third line with the bayonet. The hospital flag incident supports the view that the back of the enemy's resistance was broken. Many of the Highlanders believed that they could have done it. The 28th Brigade could have been poured in behind the supporting battalions of the 19th, and all the rest of the 21st Brigade, including the 8th Gurkhas, a regiment fresh and intact, having recently landed. And behind these there were the 35th and 36th Brigades waiting to be called up. But success could only have been secured if the original scheme had been adhered to—the two advancing brigades attacking simultaneously. The military reader will understand that a complete change of plan within forty minutes of the assault entailed a readjustment of the troops in support, and a delay which must have broken the impetus of the advance, committing us to the same piecemeal method of attack which had cost us so dear in the past.

With the five brigades at our disposal, not more than 1,800 rifles left the trenches at different times for the attack. Surely if there were any reasonable hope of taking the position we should have struck with all our force; on the other hand, if the flooded ground amounted to an impasse we should have held up the attack. The front was narrow enough with two brigades attacking, but with a single brigade it was so narrow that the Turks were able to envelop our attack without entering too deeply into the

area swept by our machine guns. In an attack through floods on a two-brigade front, the odds were all against us; on a one-brigade front they might well appear insuperable.

I have recorded two contrary points of view, both of which one hears expressed with the most positive conviction; it is doubtful if the verdict will ever be spoken. The fate of Kut was said to hang on Sannaiyat. Certainly failure there meant that Townshend's garrison must fall; but success by no means assured their relief. If we had broken through we might have brought our machine-gun battery over to the left bank and enfiladed the enemy's position at Chahela, as we had enfiladed them from the right bank at Sannaiyat. But there were still the Sinn defences to break down.

One more effort was made to prolong the struggle. A forlorn hope this, bitterly criticised; but a gallant adventure in the best manner of our ancestors. On the night of April 24th the paddle steamer *Julnar,* with a cargo of provisions sufficient to feed the garrison for three weeks, attempted to force the blockade. There were many volunteers for the enterprise. Lieut. Firman, R.N., was given the command, and Lieut.-Com. Cowley, R.N.V.R., the piloting of the ship. Cowley had been in the service of the Euphrates and Tigris Navigation Company many years and knew the river and the vessel well. The *Julnar* started her voyage at nine on a moonlight night. A surprise was, of course, impossible; she awoke the whole camp with her engines and screw; and it was not long before we heard the fusillade she drew from the Turks. She ran a terrific gauntlet of rifle and machine-gun fire from both banks as she passed through the enemy's position at Sinn, but she was well plated and sandbagged, and steamed through. She was nearing Magasis, within four miles of Kut, when she struck the steel wire hawsers which the Turks had

stretched diagonally across the stream. Her rudder became entangled, and she was held up. The enemy must have been well aware of the coming of the *Julnar*. Secrecy was well-nigh impossible. She was loaded and munitioned in Amara, a hotbed of spies, where a curious crowd gathered round the vessel every morning. Up at Falahiyeh the adventure was discussed by junior officers and many of the rank and file. With a nice calculation the Turks had laid their trap for the prize at the one point on the river where she would be out of range of the guns both of the Kut garrison and of the Relieving Force. The next morning one of our airmen sighted her moored to the bank by Magasis fort, intact and floating on her own keel. The Turks drew rations from her the same day, and christened her "The Gift." The devotion of Cowley, who had volunteered to pilot the ship, cost him his life. He died a few days afterwards of his wounds.

My own feeling is that the cable that held up the *Julnar* served us well. It saved us from further sacrifice of life and, what is of equal cost, from loss of moral in the cumulative discouragement of failure. For I do not believe we could have collected a force sufficient to carry the Sinn position before June. Given a contracted front and a stout defender like the Turk, who throws away no advantages, the question of relief resolves itself into one of mere numbers, the greater part of which one must be prepared to sacrifice in massed attacks after the manner of the Hun. We had not the transport on the river to bring such a force up to Falahiyeh and feed them.

A Kut which could have held out for another three weeks would have been a cross too heavy for the Relieving Force to bear. The very name of Kut-el-Amara had become a nightmare to all who held responsible command. Kut had become the drain of our best blood. I

always pictured a sink over which priests who have long lost all faith in the divinity they serve are bleeding victims in a kind of propitiatory sacrificial rite. So long as the demand is repeated the futile sacrifice must be made.

On April 25th, when we heard that there were to be no more frontal attacks, we bowed to the wisdom and moral courage of the decision. On April 28th Kut fell. We had lost nearly 22,000 men in our attempt to save the garrison.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FALL OF KUT

THE last communications from Townshend reached us by wireless on the morning of April 29th. "Have destroyed my guns and am destroying most of my munitions, and have sent out officers to Khalil to say am ready to surrender. Khalil is at Madug. I am unable to hold on any more. I must have some food here. I have told Khalil to-day, and have sent launch with deputation to bring food from *Julnar*." The next message told us that a Turkish regiment was approaching the fort to take over guards in Kut. "I have hoisted white flag over town and fort. Troops commence going into camp near Shumran 2 P.M. I shall shortly destroy wireless." At 1 P.M. a prearranged signal by wireless indicated that Townshend's last message had gone through.

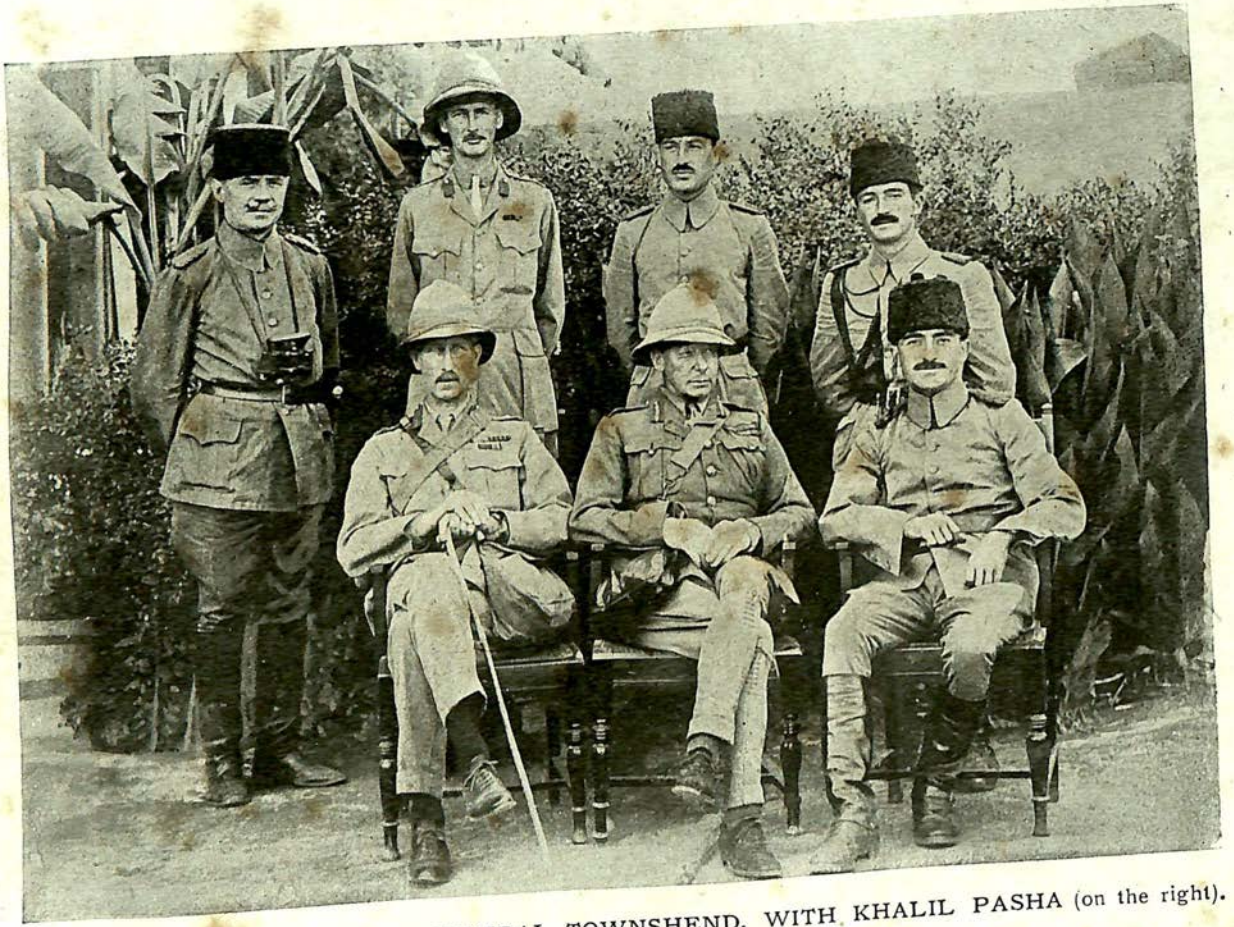
Wireless, guns, revolvers, rifles, aeroplane, ammunition, compasses, glasses—everything that might be useful to the enemy, was destroyed, and we were near enough to see the blaze. There was no Hunnish fury or obscenity in the last scene. We left the Turks our gramophone and records and anything that might contribute to the civil uses of life. Not that these standing skeletons had much in the way of amenities to offer. Since April 15th they had been living on a daily ration of four ounces of flour and a slice of horseflesh or mule.

Nine thousand fighting men, 3,000 British and 6,000 Indians, exclusive of followers, surrendered at Kut; and it is useless to try and gloss over the disgrace which is attached, not to our soldiers, but to the politicians

responsible for the disaster. There has been no surrender on the same scale in the history of the British Army. The nearest parallel to it is that of Cornwallis with 7,073 officers and men in the American War of Independence. But in Mesopotamia the relieving force lost more than twice the number of the garrison in their attempt to save them,[1] apart from the loss of prestige in the one theatre of the war where we could least afford a fluctuating standard. The Arabs believed Townshend invincible. Until the retirement from Ctesiphon the 6th Division had never attacked a position which they had not taken. The mere abstract record of their achievement was worth the substance of a new division in establishing our security on the Tigris. The British flag had never been associated with reverse. But this one set-back showed the Arab that we were fallible like other people. Upon the fall of Kut the Medjidieh and Turkish paper money fetched its old value in the bazaar. But the respect for Townshend was not greatly diminished, and it was admitted that nothing short of starvation could have defeated him.

Townshend impressed his personality deeply on the Turk. He was permitted to retain his sword; his progress to the Bosphorus was almost triumphal; and when he arrived at his island he became the lion of the place. Khalil Bey, the Turkish Commander, spoke of him with the most profound admiration when he received our *parlementaires* on the evening of the surrender. "We will give him as good a time as the Russians gave Osman Pasha," he said; and he was evidently anxious that he should receive every comfort and attention after the privations he had endured so gallantly. He regretted that his supplies were so scanty, and welcomed our proposal to send stores to the garrison. Two barges with a day and a half's iron rations left our camp the next

[1] The total casualties in the advance from Ali Gharbi (Jan. 6th—April 22nd) amounted to 21,973



AFTER THE FALL OF KUT: GENERAL TOWNSHEND, WITH KHALIL PASHA (on the right).

morning. These were followed by a hospital ship and a paddle-steamer with lighters attached loaded with food and canteen stores. The hospital ship *Sikhim* returned with the first batch of sick and wounded, whom we exchanged for Turkish prisoners. The Kut garrison at the time of the surrender were well treated by the enemy. Turkish officers gave every British soldier a handful of cigarettes as he left the camp, and British and Ottoman privates were observed fraternising with friendly and explanatory gestures. Rough fare, primitive medical arrangements, and a wretched sanitary system were inevitable in the conditions existing in Baghdad. These hardships were shared with the Turkish troops.

To turn to the diary of the siege. During the first month the garrison were fighting for their lives and were only afraid that ammunition would give out before the relieving column could reach them. They reckoned it a certainty that the reinforcements collecting at Basra would be able to join hands with Townshend and drive out the Turk. All this time the troops in Kut were receiving full rations, and the question of supplies seems to have afforded no anxiety. In the meanwhile the relieving force advancing from Ali Gharbi in the first week of January believed that Townshend was near the end of his resources. Aylmer's force was far from fully organised, and there was a whole new division on its way upstream which would have doubled our power of offensive. But, as we have seen, every hour's delay was regarded as vital, and we wasted our strength by throwing in our troops in detail as they came up the river.

As soon as we advanced from Ali Gharbi the enemy relaxed their hold on Townshend. There was no longer any danger of ammunition running short, but the check at Orah made the question of supplies serious. The civil population had remained in Kut. Upon Townshend's arrival they had been given their choice—to stay

or leave; they had a bare twenty-four hours to evacuate. They elected to stay. Neither they nor we foresaw the dark days ahead. The few who left the town in the first days of the investment were tied up by the enemy and shot, and the Turks made it quite clear that they would execute any who tried to escape. To expel them now would mean the wholesale murder of the Arab inhabitants of the town. Thus the garrison was burdened with 6,000 additional mouths.

But on January 24th, after our repulse at El Hannah, the discovery of considerable grain stores hidden away in the houses, mostly underground, opened a new phase in the investment. These were commandeered and paid for, and they afforded the garrison three months' supplies on a gradually reduced scale. The Arabs, who had previously been self-supporting, now received rations as issued to British soldiers and sepoys. Thus the story of Kut resolves itself into two distinct phases, at first a determined siege, and then a protracted investment. And in both of these, whether in the gallantry of the defence or in the endurance of privations, whether in combating the Turk or hunger, the garrison was tried and proved in a measure worthy of the most glorious traditions of the British Army.

On December 3rd, when Townshend arrived at Kut, the force opposing him consisted of four infantry divisions totalling some 15,000 rifles, 1,000 camelry, 400 cavalry, thirty-one mobile guns, seven heavy guns, and some thousands of Arab tribesmen. On the 4th he reported himself on the point of being invested. The enemy's advance guard were ten miles off, the main body five miles behind. The position Townshend held was a peninsula formed by a loop of the Tigris, 3,200 yards north to south and 1,700 yards wide; and on the right bank he held the liquorice factory and village, which he fortified, and garrisoned with two battalions. He was

invested on all sides except the west. His troops were worn out with their long fighting march from Ctesiphon, but they began at once to form a strongly entrenched camp. If anyone could save Kut it was Townshend. He had all the resourcefulness and personal magnetism which is so essential in the commander of a beleaguered garrison. He and his division were bound together by the strongest ties. They were undefeated, and the retirement from Ctesiphon had demanded and proved even higher qualities in both leader and men than had been called for in the victorious advance towards Baghdad. Also Townshend had had experience of sieges. From the beginning he prepared to defend Kut with the same resolution and resource as he had defended Chitral in 1895, and with more confidence in the issue.

On December 4th and 5th he sent the steamers and barges and most of the *mahailas* downstream, retaining one steamer only, the *Sumana*, for use as a ferry. On the 6th he sent off the cavalry brigade to Ali Gharbi, holding back one squadron; they fought a rearguard action all the way, but got through with trifling casualties. The Turkish prisoners taken at Ctesiphon, 1,400 in number, were cleared just in time. On December 7th one of the Turkish divisions had moved round his flank four miles to the south on the opposite bank of the river, and two other divisions had taken up a position on the left bank west of Kut. On the 9th Nur-ud-Din sent a letter demanding the garrison's surrender. Our refusal was followed by a heavy bombardment from north-west and south-east. The camp was attacked from all points of the compass and shelled all day. The bridgehead detachment was driven in. At night a gallant young sapper, Lieutenant Matthews, R.E., swam the river and blew up the bridge on the Turkish side in the teeth of the enemy. On the 10th and 11th attacks were pressed severely all day. Our casualties on the 10th were 129;

on the 11th, 202. The enemy had now dug up to within 600 yards, and was strengthening his works with sandbags and timber. Townshend's tactics were to keep a central mass in hand with a minimum force observing each avenue of approach. In artillery duels the garrison suffered the disadvantage of concentrated hostile fire from all sides, while their own gunfire directed from the centre to the circumference had to be divergent and disseminated. The Turks' 5-centimetre guns fired rapidly and accurately at 7,500 yards; our own 5-inch guns were very old, and little use over 6,000 yards owing to error.

On December 14th our casualties dropped to eighty-seven, on the 15th to sixty-four. The Turks were becoming tired of these ineffectual attacks, and on the 16th a general apathy was apparent amongst the enemy. They had lost at least a thousand men killed and wounded in their attacks on the 11th and 12th. During all this time the garrison made repeated sorties. On the 14th the small force in the liquorice factory drove the enemy out of their trenches 250 yards away. On the 17th, in two small sorties, thirty Turks were bayoneted; our casualties were one man slightly wounded.

Townshend estimated that his garrison was being contained by 10,000 men; but on the 24th an increased boldness in the attack indicated that the enemy had received reinforcements. The famous 52nd Division had arrived from the Caucasus front. The fort was heavily shelled. Large breaches were made in the wall. The fort garrison was driven in beyond the first line, and up to the second line, of the defence. But here the wave was held up. The Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry flung in a gallant counter-attack, and the Turks were expelled. In another fierce attack at midnight the enemy again effected a lodgment in the north-east bastion, but were again driven out, and, though ejected, came on

at breaches in the walls, bombing us at close quarters. At daylight they had retired from the bastion to their trenches 500 yards from the fort. Our casualties on the 24th and 25th were 315. Prisoners said that the enemy believed Townshend's ammunition was giving out and that the garrison must fall if the attack was pressed hotly. Hence the fury of the assault. They described our fort as a cemetery of Turkish dead, and said that the 52nd Division had been annihilated. On the 29th the enemy asked for an armistice to bury his dead and remove the wounded who lay in numbers outside the bastions. Our casualties during the first month of the siege amounted to 1,840 killed and wounded. The enemy must have lost 4,000.

The failure of the Turkish attacks on December 24th and 25th introduced a new phase. The enemy now turned his siege into a blockade investment. There were no more infantry attacks; only the daily bombardment and raids by aeroplane. The artillery fire was fairly consistent until March 22nd, when the Turks fired some thousand rounds in quick succession. After this they reserved their ammunition for the evening "strafe," generally between four and eight o'clock. The shelling was mostly confined to the town and the fort, where the Union Jack and the observation post, with a battery of 5-inch guns and the Headquarters adjacent, offered good targets. The Turks had some naval guns, but the majority were 40-pounders. On the right bank they had a species of trench mortar christened by our soldiers "Petulant Fanny." She fired very noisy 15-inch bronze shells, always in the same place, but never hit anybody.

On January 2nd the first hostile aeroplane was sighted. From February 18th to March 22nd the aviator's bombs caused more damage than shell-fire. On March 18th one bomb, falling on a hospital, killed six British soldiers on the spot and wounded twenty-eight, fourteen severely,

of whom twelve died within a few days. On March 21st four bombs were dropped in the neighbourhood of Headquarters, killing many Arab women and children, and the aviators sank a horse-boat on the river, which carried a 4.7-inch gun. After this the aerial bombardment slackened, probably through lack of ammunition. The bomb that exploded on the hospital with such appalling fatality was no doubt aimed at Townshend's Headquarters, a favourite target of the enemy's heavies. The Turkish airman who dropped it expressed the most profound regret and cannot be held guilty of the intention. Osmanli "frightfulness" has much to answer for, but the sinking of hospital ships and firing at the Red Cross is not part of the code.

The advance of our relieving column in the first week of January drew off the greater part of the Turkish Army, leaving a minimum force to carry on the work of investment. From this period the diary of the siege is concerned more with fighting hunger, and the postponement of date which was given from time to time as the last day the garrison could hold out indicated in each case a reduction in the scale of rations. Horse-meat at first was plentiful, but very few of the Indian troops were willing to eat it. Their loathing was more physical than spiritual, for Townshend communicated through wireless with the leaders of the chief religious communities in India and obtained from them a ruling that this siege meat was lawful. Nevertheless, the sepoys' reluctance could not be overcome, and Townshend hesitated to coerce them. In lieu of horse-meat they were given a larger flour ration than the British troops.

The days following the set-back at El Hannah were a grim foretaste to the besieged of the evil days in front of them. With the further reduction in rations the Force became familiar with hunger. The continued suspense was hard to bear. But at this time, and two months

afterwards for that matter, there was no question in their minds as to the ultimate issue. They only asked "How long?" Townshend himself was the chief fountain of optimism. He was always on his rounds, visiting the sick, chatting with the men, inspiring confidence and cheerfulness everywhere. He was a born commander in a siege, as great with his back to the wall parrying calamity as in the thrust of an offensive. The personality of the man may be read in his communiqués. On January 26th he issued an address to the garrison, taking them into his confidence, explaining how things stood, and exactly what part they were playing.

"The relieving force under General Aylmer has been unsuccessful in its efforts to dislodge the Turks entrenched on the left bank of the river some fourteen miles below the position at Sinn, where we defeated them in September last.

"Our relieving force suffered severe loss and had very bad weather to contend against; they are entrenched close to the Turkish position. More reinforcements are on their way up-river, and I confidently expect to be relieved some day during the first half of the month of February. I desire all ranks to know why I decided to make a stand at Kut during our retirement from Ctesiphon. It was because, as long as we hold Kut, the Turks cannot get their ships, barges, stores and munitions past this place, and so cannot move down to attack Amara, and thus we are holding up the whole of the Turkish advance. It also gives time for our reinforcements to come up-river from Basra, and so restore success to our arms.

"It gives time to our Allies the Russians to move towards Baghdad, which a large force is now doing. I had a personal message from General Baratoff, in command of the Russian Expeditionary Force in Persia, telling me of his admiration of what you men of the 6th Division and troops attached have done in the past few

months, and telling of his own progress on the road from Kermanshah towards Baghdad. By standing at Kut I maintain the territory we have won in the past year at the expense of much blood, commencing with your glorious victory at Shaiba, and thus we maintain the campaign as a glorious one, instead of letting disaster pursue its course down to Amara, and perhaps beyond.

"I have ample food for eighty-four days, and that is not counting the 3,000 animals which can be eaten. When I defended Chitral some twenty years ago we lived well on *atta* and horse-flesh; but, as I repeat, I expect confidently to be relieved in the first half of the month of February. Our duty stands out clear and simple. It is our duty to our Empire, to our beloved King and country, to stand here and hold up the Turkish advance as we are doing now, and with the help of all, heart and soul together, we will make this defence to be remembered in history as a glorious one. All in India and England are watching us now, and are proud of the splendid courage you have shown; and I tell you let all remember the glorious defence of Plevna, for that is what is in my mind.

"I am absolutely calm and confident as to the result. The Turk, though good behind the trench, is of little value in the attack. They have tried it once, and their losses in one night in their attempt on the fort were 2,000 alone.

"They have already had very heavy losses from General Aylmer's musketry and guns, and I have no doubt they have had enough.

* * * * *

"I have done my duty. You know the result, and whether I was right or not, and your name will go down to history as the heroes of Ctesiphon, for heroes you proved yourselves in the battle. I, perhaps, by right, should not have told you of the above; but I feel I owe

it to you all to speak straight and openly and to take you into my confidence, for, God knows, I felt our heavy losses and the suffering of my poor brave wounded, and shall remember it as long as I live, and I may truly say that no general I know of has been more loyally obeyed and served than I have been in command of the Sixth Division.

"These words are long, I am afraid, but I speak straight from the heart, and you will see that I have thrown all officialdom overboard. We will succeed—mark my words!—but save your ammunition as if it were gold!"

Heartening words these, introducing into the dead wearisome routine something of the spirit of the offensive. There was no darkness or secrecy about Townshend. Those who had been merely resigned understood now that the garrison was active, not passive, doing, not suffering, containing the Turks and not contained by them; and this amounted to an almost physical stimulus.

The considerable stores of grain discovered on January 24th could not be utilised at once owing to the difficulty of grinding for so large a garrison; but millstones were dropped in the camp by aeroplane, and the engine was fed by oil stored in the naval barges. By this time the stench in Kut was becoming intolerable, and an epidemic was feared. Before February 6th scurvy had set in. Townshend planted vegetable seeds on January 26th, and these bore welcome fruit before the garrison capitulated. The real privations of the garrison began in the middle of February, especially in hospital. When the milk gave out (February 17th) the patients' diet was confined to cornflour or rice water for the sick, and ordinary rations for the wounded. The dysenteric or enteric convalescent was put straight on to a diet of mule.[1] On February 5th British soldiers were receiving a 12-oz. loaf of mixed barley, atta, and wheat flour, 1 lb.

of horse-meat, a few groceries, and a small supply of dates. Indian rations were 1 lb. of flour, half-rations of tea, turmeric, chillies, ginger, etc., and a small supply of dates. British and Indian groceries lasted on this small scale until March 5th. By the first week of February the garrison had run out of rice, sugar, dhal, gour (Indian sugar) and vegetables, and there was milk in hospital for ten days only. Animals had a three-quarter barley ration, but no fodder, and the grain was sufficient to keep stock which would supply the garrison with meat for forty days.

By the end of January the horse-meat ration was being issued. The issue alternated at first with the beef of the heavy battery bullocks. Every artillery, cavalry, and transport horse or mule was consumed before the end. When the artillery horses had gone the drivers formed a new unit styled "The Kut Foot." One of the last mules to be slaughtered had been on three Indian Frontier campaigns and wore the ribbons on its neck. The Supply and Transport butcher had sent it back twice, refusing to kill it, but in the end it had to go with the machine-gun mules. Mule-flesh was generally preferred to horse-flesh, and mule-fat supplied good dripping, also an improvised substitute for lamp oil. The fuel of crude oil for cooking lasted the whole of the siege. This gave out rank fumes, and the regimental cooks were easily distinguishable, being black as chimney-sweeps through the smoke and smut of the oil ranges.

The tobacco famine was a great privation, but the garrison did not find that forced abstention cured the craving. Every kind of substitute was tried. The local brand, a species similar to that smoked in Indian hookas, was exhausted early in April. After that lime leaves were smoked, mixed by some with ginger or baked tea dregs. In January English "baccy" fetched Rs. 48 for half a pound; a box of cheap Indian cheroots (value Rs. 2-8) fetched Rs. 204; a box of Egyptian cigarettes,

Rs. 100; a tin of condensed milk, Rs. 34. In the town you could buy a local cigarette for eight annas and a loaf of sugar for fifty rupees. The merchants of Kut made small fortunes out of these sales, and there was a certain traffic in the bazaar even during the last week of the investment. It was believed that strong Arab swimmers used to carry supplies downstream under cover of night, and in the light of the extraordinary boldness, resource and endurance displayed by the Buddoo all along in any form of profitable depredation by night, the story is credible enough.

Some units had got in a timely store just before the investment. One regimental mess had 20,000 cigarettes; another had drinks which held out very nearly until the end; but things had come to such a pass that any search for hospitality seemed almost indecent. Certain messes were avoided through a too sensitive delicacy. Dives was willing, but Lazarus would not approach. Happily the garrison was well clad. Just before they entered Kut a large consignment of warm clothing arrived, the gift of the British Red Cross Society. This must have saved many lives, as the troops had only the summer kit they stood up in.

The different units saw very little of each other during the siege. At the beginning indirect machine-gun and rifle fire, in addition to shells, swept the whole area day and night. The troops only left the dug-outs for important defence works. During the latter phase, when the fire slackened, the officers and men had very little strength to break the monotony of the siege in the way of games, exercise and amusements, but on the right bank the two battalions in the liquorice factory, the 110th Mahrattas and the 121st Infantry, were better off, and there was some dead ground here, a pitch of about fifty yards by twenty, where they could play hockey and cricket with pick handles and a rag ball. Also they

fished, and did so with success, supplementing the rations at the same time. Two companies of the Norfolks joined them in turn, crossing by the ferry at night. They appreciated the relief.

On March 2nd, owing to the shortage of fuel for the mill, the barley meal ration was reduced from a pound to three-quarters for the Indian troops, but 6 ounces were issued for parching. The death-rate now increased. The vitality of the troops was very low; the recuperative power of the sick was at a minimum; those suffering from serious diseases could not hope to survive; before the end trivial ailments were often fatal, and wounds would not heal. Skin and flesh lost the power of renovation, and the surgeons could do nothing where nature would not play her part. The scurvy trouble among the Indians became more and more aggravated. As many as 1,050 cases were admitted to hospital during the siege, besides those treated regimentally. The sepoy's horror of horse-flesh in many cases cost him his life, for in the end, when he was driven by starvation to eat it, he was so weak that the power of digestion and assimilation had gone. Those who ate it at the beginning fared better, and the Gurkhas, who never had any scruples in the matter, best of all.

On March 9th, after the unsuccessful attack on the Dujaila Redoubt, the British ration loaf was reduced from 12 to 10 ounces. The Dujaila failure was an even greater disappointment than the reverses in January. The garrison were waiting expectantly for the relief. It was understood that another great effort was being made by Aylmer's column, who were to strike in the morning, and that they were striking with all their force. At 4.30 A.M. the men besieged in Kut were standing to arms. The sound of guns grew nearer. All day they waited with eyes strained on the other bank. But Aylmer's force did not appear. Once more their hopes

were kindled only to flicker and die out; and the suspense and strain left them weary with an exhaustion which infected the body through the mind.

On the 10th Townshend issued another communiqué: "As on a former occasion, I take the troops of all ranks into my confidence again. We have now stood a three months' siege in a manner which has called upon you the praise of our beloved King and our fellow-countrymen in England, Scotland, Ireland and India, and all this after your brilliant battles of Kut-el-Amara and Ctesiphon and your retirement to Kut, all of which feats of arms are now famous. Since 5th December, 1915, you have spent three months of cruel uncertainty, and to all men and all people uncertainty is intolerable. As I say, on the top of all this comes the second failure to relieve us. And I ask you also to give a little sympathy to me who have commanded you in these battles referred to, and who, having come to you as a stranger, now love my command with a depth of feeling I have never known in my life before. When I mention myself I would also mention the names of the generals under me, whose names are distinguished in the Army as leaders of men.

"I am speaking to you as I did before, straight from the heart, and, as I say, I ask your sympathy for my feelings, having promised you relief on certain dates on the promise of those ordered to relieve us. Not their fault, no doubt. Do not think that I blame them; they are giving their lives freely, and deserve our gratitude and admiration. But I want you to help me again, as before. I have asked General Aylmer for the next attempt to bring such numbers as will break down all resistance and leave no doubt as to the issue. In order, then, to hold out, I am killing a large number of horses so as to reduce the quantity of grain eaten every day, and I have had to reduce your ration. It is necessary

to do this in order to keep our flag flying. I am determined to hold out, and I know you are with me heart and soul."

On March 31st rations were again reduced. On April 8th the mill stopped working for want of fuel; flour had been ground to last until April 15th. On April 16th the flour ration was reduced to 4 ounces for British and Indian. Small opium pills were distributed among the sepoys by the medical staff to stay the pangs of hunger. By this time all Indians were eating horse-flesh. On April 21st the 4-ounce ration gave out. From the 22nd to the 25th the garrison subsisted on two days' reserve rations issued in January. After our third repulse at Sannaiyat, on April 22nd, immediate relief was hopeless. The only chance for the garrison lay in the *Julnar*, which on the night of the 24th attempted to force the blockade and failed. In the meanwhile Kut was fed by aeroplane. This air service gave the garrison another four days, but the carriage of such heavy freight was too great a tax on the machines. Previously they had been employed for dropping light articles into camp, such as rifle cleaners, spare parts for wireless, drugs and medical dressings, saccharin, seine nets for fishing, and at one time cigarettes and tobacco. But as it was impossible to supply all, Townshend ruled out these luxuries as introducing a form of privilege. He himself shared every privation with his troops.

After April 20th many of the Arabs in the town, feeling the pinch of hunger, made attempts to escape by river. These men are splendid swimmers. Two of them got through to our camp with the help of the strong current. One, supported by skin bladders, made the journey by night in eight hours; the other concealed himself during the day and arrived on the second night. A third, the sole survivor of a party of eighteen, came through on a raft with a bullet in his leg. The Turks

fired on them from the bank; four had been killed; the others, many of them wounded, dived into the river, and it is doubtful if any of them escaped. These Arabs spoke of the cheerfulness of the garrison, who they said looked thin, but hard and strong. The inhabitants of Kut were still confident that the place would be relieved; this confidence in Townshend, based on his personality and the achievements of the troops under his command, amounted to something like superstition. They abandoned the town out of sheer hunger.

Before the end the garrison were on the verge of starvation. During the last week of the siege the daily death-rate averaged eight British and twenty-one Indians. The troops were so exhausted that the regiments who were holding the front line remained there a fortnight without being relieved. They were too weak to dig. Men on sentry-go would drop at their posts. Colonel Hehir, the senior medical officer, has recorded cases of Indians returning from the trenches in the evening, seemingly with nothing the matter, who lay down and were found dead in the morning, dead of exhaustion; they simply had not strength for the effort of life. He doubted whether the strongest man in the garrison was equal to a five-mile march carrying his equipment. Still, hope was not yet dead. Our machine-gun and rifle fire were heard at Beit Aieesa; the flashes of our guns were seen at night; and on April 20th General Aylmer wired: "Stick to it. Gorringe will relieve you in a few days." They stuck to it. They hung on. On the day of surrender the men in the trenches were too weak to carry back their kit.

The bitterness of the end may perhaps have been softened by the knowledge that they had done everything within mortal bounds that could be done. They must have had some inward sense of their long devotion under trial. It could not be otherwise; for messages had reached

them before the wireless was destroyed which bore witness to the recognition of it by their countrymen in no uncertain terms. But another crushing disappointment was in store. A passage in Townshend's last communiqué, dated April 28th, offered hopes of release:

"These considerations alone, namely, that I can help my comrades of all ranks to the end, have decided me to overcome my bodily illness and the anguish of mind which I am suffering now, and I have interviewed the Turkish General-in-Chief yesterday, who is full of admiration at 'an heroic defence of five months,' as he puts it. Negotiations are still in progress, but I hope to be able to announce your departure for India, on parole not to serve against the Turks, since the Turkish Commander says he thinks it will be allowed, and has wired to Constantinople to ask for this, and that the *Julnar*, which is lying with food for us at Magasis now, may be permitted to come to us. Whatever has happened, my comrades, you can only be proud of yourselves. We have done our duty to King and Empire; the whole world knows that we have done our duty. I ask you to stand by me with your steady and splendid discipline, shown throughout, in the next few days for the expedition of all service I demand of you."

Instead of release on parole, captivity awaited them with all its hardships and humiliations. The long-drawn months ran into years, and more than half of the rank and file succumbed to the hard conditions of exile. When the armistice was concluded it was found that of 2,680 British N.C.O.s and privates taken at Kut, 1,306 had died and 449 remained untraced: that is, over 65 per cent. perished. Of the 10,486 Indians, combatants and followers, 1,290 died and 1,773 were untraced. "These figures," says the report, "give the exact measure of the meaning of captivity in Turkey." Most of the Kut prisoners perished in the terrible crossing of the desert between Samarrah and

Aleppo in June. They were separated from their officers, and those who were too weak to march were left to die by the roadside, stripped of their clothes by the Arabs, exhausted with dysentery and starvation, and with no medical attendance. It was a history of brutal callousness and neglect which, if we had known it at the time, would have left us no illusions about the Turk.

A few hundred British and Indians whose condition was precarious were exchanged at once for healthy Turkish prisoners. Among them were four British officers. I was a patient in the hospital at Basra on May 6th, when an emaciated figure was brought in and deposited in the bed next to mine. He was one of the four exchanged Kut prisoners. Dysentery, with the siege diet of horse-flesh and atta, had left only the skin on his bones, but he beamed with a *joie de vivre* which lit up his features like a candle in a hollow turnip mask. He told me a lot about Kut, but more about what he was going to do in the next few months. In the evening he tottered to the veranda and stood leaning on the rails looking out over the river.

"By Jove!" he said, "it's jolly standing here like a kid and seeing people going about, and watching the steamers, and not having to duck for bullets."

CHAPTER XIX

WAITING FOR THE SHAMAL

BASRA is a green spot. As one entered it after a journey downstream from the burnt and treeless zone where we were fighting, the whiff of a mimosa tree or siris, blown across the bows of one's steamer, carried with it a pleasant shock. Four days' easy steaming brought one out of the uncompromising desert into tropical verdure. The true palm zone begins a few miles above Qurna, and extends to the mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab; but it clings closely to the river. Penetrate it anywhere north or south of the city, and in half a mile or so you will pass out of the shade into barren sands. We smile at the Garden of Eden myth, but it is the most natural thing that the Babylonian or Chaldaean should have taken the first green shade of the desert for the seat of bliss.

The Moslem geographers of the twelfth century tell us that the Gardens of the Uballa Canal at Basra were held by the Arabs to be one of the four earthly paradises. It is an Elysium thinly partitioned from Tartarus. For, as the Arabs say, the date palm has its feet in water and its head in hell. Still, the lushness is there, and a certain exotic beauty. The trunks are festooned with vines which make a canopy; and fig trees and pomegranates with scarlet flowers grow beneath.

It is through these palm groves that the British Tommy or tar passes on raised bunds between the dusty wharves, depots and dockyards to his work. But he finds nothing of the spirit of Eden in the scene, for there is little refreshment in Basra other than to the eye. His

skin is not brown like that of his comrades from upstream, but flecked with the peculiar pattern of yellow white or pink that the mosquitoes and sand-flies have printed on it, assisted in their design by the more capricious stencillings of prickly heat. His shirt, opened at the front, reveals a mosaic; shirt and shorts are connected by a spinepad buttoned to the collar at the neck and saturated with sweat. The very air seems to sweat. Strike a match and it will burn dully without a flicker as if the flame were choked. One's cane, the arms of one's chair, are sticky as the touch of an unwashed child's treacly fingers. Yet, in spite of the humidity of the air, the thermometer rises to 110 degrees or 112 degrees Fahrenheit in the shade; in July, 1917, it rose to 122 degrees. But there is a respite. We were waiting in the third week of June for the Shamal, that blessed wind, which, according to the manual, should blow from the north, purging and sweetening the air for forty days on end.

The detached, lotus-eating, philosophic attitude of mind, which, like the date palm, is the natural issue of this humid atmosphere, was not indulged. Basra was as busy as other war centres; the Shatt-el-Arab was as noisy as the Clyde; hours were as long; only life was the more strenuous for the sweat on one's brow. At half-past five in the morning the crowd of workmen was passing under my balcony in the street. The first hideous shriek of the siren has sounded; and the sun's rays are already licking the nape of one's neck with that insinuating, tentative touch which is the most disagreeable sensation of the day. There is no freshness here in the dawn.

Basra, or Ashar, to give it its right name—the old city of Basra lies three miles up the creek—has always been cosmopolitan. But the mob of workmen, mechanics, coolies, merchants, clerks that thronged the streets in the early morning were probably as diverse in accents as any crowd that had gathered since the original cleavage

among mankind at Babel. Their garments must have been more variegated in shape and hue than the raiment that was seen on the plains of Shinar.

Turbaned and Christie-hatted Orientals of all shades, the meanest often the most occidental in attire, jostle one another in an unending procession—tarbushes, topees, turbans, straw hats, skull-caps, the Arab's *aagal* and *kefieh*, the elongated felt coal-scuttle of the Lur or Kurd, the brimless top hat of the Bakhtiari, the black astrakhan of the north. A Bushire coolie in bare feet and tightly fitting English frock-coat presses on the heels of a Seyyid, descendant of Ali, whose tarbush is wound round with the green turban. Behind follows a Bengali in his dhoti, a Madras servant with rings in his ears like an illustration in "Little Henry's Bearer," a Chinaman in spectacles and straw hat carrying his saw, but looking as scholarly as a professor. Parsees, Zanzibaris, Swahilis, Abyssinians, Greeks, Jews of all countries, especially of Baghdad; Christians innumerable, Chaldaeans, Armenians, Sabaeans, Nestorians, Jacobites; coal-black Arabs, issue of the slave trade; precise Persians with their black or brown *abas* flowing from the shoulder like the undergraduate's gown, lascars from all the coasts of the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal, and every imaginable breed of sepoy from the Konkan Mahratta to the Gurung of Nepal, from the Usufzai to the wiry little Sudhan of the Poonch hills.

The craft on the river is almost as hybrid and varied as the flotsam and jetsam of the streets. You pass a wattle-roofed shanty hitched on some primeval barge, which is very possibly a lineal descendant of Noah's Ark. Next to it is the latest design of monitor or gunboat, the neat little *Flycatcher* perhaps, clean as a pin, issue of Thornycroft's, which began life in the Turkish Navy, was sunk by us, and looks the cleaner for her dip. She will fight in three feet of water in a ditch. But grace is

ARAB RIVER CRAFT AT BASRA.

not only to the fleet and strong. Witness the beautiful lines of the *mahaila*, that painted Saga ship of bold and sweeping curves and barbed prow; or the Arab *buggalow* with the penthouse roof astern, intricately carved, and windows through which you look for the head of Sinbad; or the *boom* of Koweit with its sharp stern and nose of a swordfish. Contrast these with the squat ugliness of the "beetle," or lighter launch, or the cumbrous posterior of the stern-wheeler. But amidst all these ships—Merchant Service, Navy, Royal Indian Marine, or humbler river craft—there is one small vessel to which Tommy will always take off his hat. She used to lie snugly against the steps under London Bridge. For a penny she would take you to Westminster or the Tower; and now, like others who are doing their bit, she has found her way to the Shatt-el-Arab under her own steam.

I was leaning on the rail of the Commodore's yacht one particular stuffy evening in June, when a sailor friend by my side gave a shout of joy.

"By Jove! I'll be damned if that isn't the *Buttercup!* I took my wife from Kingston to Henley in her in June, 1914. I wonder if they have varnished her stern. My missis nearly burnt the locker out with her etna. I remember we lay up under some willows to make tea."

And he handed me his glasses so that I might decipher the name *Buttercup*, in characters almost as golden as the flower, on the stern of the little yellow motor boat lying snugly under the Army Commander's pier.

I think we both registered an inward oath, swearing by the willows of Henley and the pearly evening light on the Thames that after the War was over we would never leave the land of gardens and grey cottages and golden meadows, or welter under an Eastern sun again.

In May and June and the first half of July I sampled the different kinds of heat and torment endured by that

long-suffering body of troops who were referred to collectively as Force D—the moist and tropical heat of the Euphrates and the Shatt-el-Arab, the parched and desert heat of the Tigris and Karun, the heavy-laden atmosphere of Bushire. Each variety had its attendant insects, its own peculiar plague—dysentery, fever, skin disease, jaundice, boils and eruptions of every kind. On the Karun you might be stricken with what is commonly known as "dog-rot," the legacy of some poisonous fly. The water of the Tigris engendered colic. The Baghdad boil and the Aleppo date were other ills of the country. They left a permanent impression of Mesopotamia burnt into you—a cicatrix for life.

The heat of the desert in tents and trenches is staggering. One feels as if one were standing at the edge of a huge fire in a high wind, licked by gusts of flame. The hot air leaps up and buffets one, there is an element of combat in it. The heat is fierce rather than oppressive and depressing; it does not infect one with the same insidious relaxation of fibre and spirit. Then there are the almost daily dust storms—a sudden darkness, a rustle and a shadow, a pillar of dust spiralling and gyrating on its base, tearing across the desert. Then a pause. But for a moment only. The spirit that is abroad is contagious. Other dust devils leap up and swirl. Soon the whole plain is in motion. The air is darkened, the heat is heavy and sullen. Hot blasts no longer buffet you. There is a uniform dead weight to support, against which one feels one could put up a better defensive if one were supine. But the man in the office, tent, or dug-out winds a wet towel round his head and goes plugging on with his work.

In the last week of May I spent a week at a place called Rahda in the Persian oilfields, between the Tul-i-Khayyat and the Imam Riza ranges. In a tent here in August the thermometer never fell below 120 degrees for three days and nights, and it reached a maximum of 120.

The Karun district is reputed one of the hottest fire-pits in Asia. It was in this region that some men of the 44th Merwaras died of thirst after a few hours' march without water in the sun. It was from Ahwaz that the 12th Brigade made their desert march to Amara in June, 1915, an exploit of which little was heard, but which will be numbered with the great classic marches of history.

But in 1916 our small force on the Karun were nearly all under roofs or matting. No one with a roof over his head had any "grouse" if he had been through hot weather under canvas. It was only in tents and in the trenches that the heat was insupportable.

But no shelter excluded the fly. There was no respite or truce in the plagues of Mesopotamia, and the only normal thing in the country on which one could count was that the plague-cycle was unbroken and continuous, that the plagues overlapped. The plagues of May are dust, heat and flies; and the greatest of these is flies. At the end of February, someone was saying that for six weeks at any rate between the mud and the heat, in the clear air, cloudless days and fresh nights, we were better off than our comrades in France. He was of the "French School." An old campaigner in the country, one of the "Mesopotamian School," rebuked his optimism. "Touch wood," he said; "to-night I saw a fly."

The flies in the tents, dug-outs and trenches, unless seen, were unbelievable. To describe them is to hazard one's reputation for truth. You could not eat without swallowing flies. You waved your spoon of porridge in the air to shake them off; you put your biscuits and bully beef in your pocket, and surreptitiously conveyed them in closed fist to your mouth, but you swallowed flies all the same. They settled in clouds on everything. When you wrote you could not see the end of your pen. I overtook a squadron of cavalry, and, in that state of semi-

coma in which the heat wraps one, I thought they were wearing chain-armour. I had walked my horse beside them some minutes before I discovered that what looked like mail was the steely blue metallic mesh of flies. At the beginning of the fly season I saw a distant squadron of horse waving their handkerchiefs rhythmically in the air, as if they were cheering. A hardly credible demonstration on the part of the undemonstrative trooper, and I took it for a trick of the mirage until I discovered that they were waving off flies. The Mesopotamian variety is indistinguishable from the English house-fly except that many of them, one in twenty perhaps, will bite. These apparently are not a different species, only more impregnated with vice.

At night the flies disappear, and the mosquitoes and sand-flies relieve them, completing the vicious circle. Mosquitoes are local. In many places you may be spared them altogether, but there are districts where they were employed by the gods which plagued us as the chief scourge. In one camp I struck a species which could bite through cord riding-breeches. The habitat of this insect was in a camp between the "Twin Pimples" and "The Boil."

There was something almost Bunyanesque in the nomenclature we used in Mesopotamia. The "Pimples" and "Boils," and worse, on the map may be chargeable to our surveyors, but much of it we fell into quite inadvertently. Nothing could be more appropriate, for instance, than that our army should be called Force D; or that so much of its energies should have been directed against a position called Sinn.

The sand-fly is another and more insidious plague. A net with a mesh fine enough to exclude him is suffocating, and he will keep one awake at night with a hose of thin acid playing on one's face. He is also the transmitter of a microbe which will lay you by the heels for

three days with a virulent fever. Scientific experts followed one another up the river all through the hot weather, singly and in commissions, entomologists, bacteriologists, protozoologists, and learned men whose opinion was recognised as the last word in sanitation and hygiene. The popular idea seemed to be that they had come to prescribe means for the destruction, or rather the prevention, of insect life in Mesopotamia. But the sand-fly, breeding in creeks and holes in the desert, defied them all.

In the first week of May the old campaigner consoled us with the remark that the flies would soon be dead. "The heat kills them," he explained; "frizzles them up like wool in a flame." This, by way of consolation when it was 108 degrees in the shade, recalled the story of that fabulous stream which, as the nigger explained, was free of alligators, the alligators being "too plenty afraid of sharks." Still, we looked forward to the heat which would kill the flies. "You'll see they will die off when it gets really hot," the old campaigner said, smiling unsympathetically at our air of relief.

"What do you call really hot?" I asked.

"Oh, about 112 degrees in one's tent. Of course, it goes up to anything—130 degrees, or more. The flies won't bother you then."

I thought of the week in the Punjab which is the climacteric of the hot weather, when the mosquitoes die, the crows gape, and the brain-fever bird ceases to sing. But in India heat is tempered by houses. One is armed against it externally with punkahs and cold baths, thick walls and roof, and doors and windows that shut it out, and internally by ice and cool drinks. Spreading trees are planted by the roadside; but in Mesopotamia, where we were fighting, there was no shade, not so much as a single scraggy date palm.

Naturally an officer's thoughts went back to France,

to Sunday lunches at Bethune, fruit and flowers, and coffee and rolls, or the *pâtisserie* of Madame Celeste, and the white cloth spread under the linden trees. The smell of those lindens was sweet. A year or more in this country, with no leave, or billets, or change to look forward to, made a long lap in one's service. No doubt the taste for civilisation was the sweeter for it.

The morning's work done, you lay in your tent with the flaps open and the side-flies lifted up, and gasped through the long day waiting for the sun to go down. Your only apparel was a sola topee or a wet towel round your head. But you were clothed in dust and sweat. The thermometer ran up to 130 degrees in a tent, where the temperature was, of course, much higher than the Government standard reading under a board and thatch. Outside one seldom wore a coat. Force D led the simple life, and was brought up against elemental needs. The Mesopotamian sun corrodes all pride. It is so corrosive of vanity that the staff officer will ride abroad in his shirt-sleeves innocent of red tabs. But one wears a sunguard over one's helmet, and a spine-pad, for one can get sunstroke here through the small of one's back.

The persistent hot wind is better than complete stillness, though it bounces off the ground and buffets you, flinging the sand and dust in your face. You eat sand, breathe sand, lie in sand, have sand in your ears and eyes and clothes. Sand-flies by night; flies by day, until they shrivel up; sand and suffocation by day and by night.

A certain home journal, at the beginning of the War, spoke of "Our picnic in Mesopotamia." The author of the phrase would have had a thin time of it if he had been run to earth by our troops. But the thing that touched them on the raw was a statement in the newspapers that the men at the front were being given ice and soda-water and electric fans and every possible alleviation of the heat.

Thanks to a saving sense of humour and his native resilience of spirit, the British soldier is unbowed by these climatic buffetings. He "keeps his end up" through all the plagues of Mesopotamia.

"When it's 'ot it's —— 'ot; and when it's cold it's —— cold, and there's no —— in-between." The British soldier has only two adjectives. Supply the staple epithet in the first two blanks and the second and less picturesque one in the third, and you have a succinct definition of the meteorological conditions of Mesopotamia from the popular point of view.

CHAPTER XX

THE KARUN RIVER AND THE OILFIELDS

Our troops on the Karun River formed the right wing of our army in Mesopotamia; the Tigris the centre; and the Euphrates the left. If the command of the Gulf and the security of our line of communications to the east from flank attack by sea was our first object in going to Mesopotamia, the safeguarding of the oilfields at Maidun-i-Naftun was the second, and this alone would have made a military expedition necessary.

Maidun-i-Naftun (the plain of the oil) lies in a cup in the hills seventy miles north-east of Ahwaz, in the Bakhtiari country. The Khans of the tribes are shareholders in the oilfields, and in addition to their shares they receive an assured subsidy for guarding the company's works. The oil is carried by pipes over a stretch of country 142 miles in length to the refineries at Abadan on the Shatt-el-Arab. From the point that it leaves the hills, the pipe line passes through the country of the Sheikh of Muhammerah, whose interests, as in the case of the Khans, are bound up with those of the company. He leases to them a tract on the island of Abadan, and accepts responsibility for the security of the pipe-line and the company's employees in its limits.

But security in Persia, whether in peace or war, is never an assured blessing. From February to May, 1915, was an anxious period. The whole of western Persia save the Sheikh of Muhammerah's faithful Muhasin and the Khan's following, and the Wali of Pusht-i-Kuh, had been bought with German gold. The Bawi tribe, led and

instigated by the Turks, rose in response to the Jehad. The Chaab took the field accompanied by their mullahs. Ahwaz was threatened. On January 27th the Europeans left the town for Muhammerah. On February 2nd a naval officer in the gunboat which had come up the river as an escort was shot in the streets. The Bawi and Anafijah and others of the Sheikh's tribes in the neighbourhood of the line breached the pipes and fired the oil. Muhammerah himself was staunch to us throughout. His family is bound to the British Government by mutual service and long and honourable traditions of good faith. His interests are so identified with ours that his loyalty is taken as a matter of course. All through the trouble he kept a force at Marid to protect the refinery at Abadan. He also sent troops to Ahwaz to hold the hostile Chaab and the Mirs of Jarrah and Hindijan. But for his influence the rising would have been general and widespread.

In the beginning of February a small British column under General Robinson advanced up the Karun River to Ahwaz and camped on the right bank opposite Naseri. Though we could ill spare troops at the time, this Karun column was essential, as a Turkish force of eight battalions, with artillery and Arab irregulars, was descending on the river from Amara by Bisaitin and Illah, threatening the pipe-line and the tribes who had remained loyal to the Sheikh. On March 3rd General Robinson engaged the enemy seven miles from camp, where the Turks were encountered in company with thousands of Arab tribesmen who had rallied to their support. He did well to effect a retirement without a catastrophe. A small detachment of the Dorsets, some thirty rifles, and a troop of the 33rd Cavalry on whom the brunt of the rearguard action fell, repelled the attacks of the Arabs time after time when they threatened to surround us and cut off our retreat to camp. It was the rough handling

they received from the Dorsets, and also, as some of them confessed, their almost superstitious awe of our gunboat on the river, which kept them at a distance during the next month. They outnumbered us by at least five to one, but they were too timid to press home their advantage; they dared not take the offensive and attack our camp. We, with a small force, were content to hold them while the decisive issue was being fought on the Euphrates side. As for the tribesmen, they waited to see which way things would turn; they were not out for casualties; true to their tradition they were "bold only to pursue." When the defeat of the Turks at Shaiba on April 14th brought the British lion into his old prominence on their horizon their game was up. The 12th Division under General Gorringe was concentrating on the Karun, and for the time being the trouble in Turkish Arabistan had passed. The Bawi submitted to the Sheikh; the Chaab, as a result of a punitive expedition to Falahyieh by Sheikh Chasib, returned to the fold; and on May 21st pumping recommenced on the oilfields of Maidun-i-Naftun.

But there was the price to pay. By May 7th the 12th Division and the cavalry brigade had reached Illah on the Kerkha, whither Mahomed Pasha Daghistani, with his regulars and tribal levies, had retreated on hearing of the Turkish defeat at Shaiba. The enemy did not immediately continue their retirement, since they hoped that we should be held up by the river, which offered a formidable obstacle to our advance. The stream was rapid and deep, 250 yards wide, and we had no pontoons. The Kerkha, however, did not defeat us. With the aid of makeshift canvas boats on skeleton frames, bales of grass done up in tarpaulins and ropes, and other such ingenuities which the sapper never fails to provide, we effected a crossing, and no sooner were we on the right bank than Daghistani made off in the direc-

tion of Amara. General Gorringe then turned his attention to the village of Khafajiyeh, the stronghold of the Beni Taruf Arabs, a truculent tribe who had been operating with the Turks round Ahwaz and who had mutilated our wounded and dead. Once more the Kerkha had to be crossed, and it was no easy matter. A subadar major[1] and twenty men of the 76th Punjabis swam the river under heavy fire and brought back a boat in which troops were ferried across until sufficient were collected to assault a mud fort which was strongly held. The place was burned to the ground. Only the colony of the Persian traders was respected, and their houses left standing.

The expedition from Ahwaz had a double object. It was punitive, and at the same time a demonstration in connection with General Townshend's advance on the Tigris from Qurna to Amara. In both objects it was entirely successful. The Beni Taruf Arabs and other hostile tribes were brought into submission; the whole of Persian Arabistan was cleared of the enemy; and the Turkish column on this side, though they put up no opposition, were so occupied that they were prevented from reinforcing the troops which were opposing Townshend's advance on the Tigris. When Daghistani's force reached Amara they were surprised by General Townshend, who was already in occupation of the town. A part of his advance guard was captured, and the remainder had to disperse with the loss of two guns.

Such, briefly, were the operations which established peace on the Karun and security in the oilfields. The burning march of Colonel Dunlop's column across the desert from Khafajiyeh to Amara in June was an historic achievement. The country was uncharted and offered no supplies. The transport carts took stores ahead and made small depots; otherwise we could not have got through.

[1] Subadar Major Ajab Khan.

Officers' kit was cut down to 10 lb. The column marched from four to eight in the morning and from six to nine in the evening. Every day the thermometer rose to 120 degrees in the shade. An officer in the West Kents has given me some vivid details of the trek. "From eight to eight it was hell," he said; "from six in the morning until seven at night you could not take off your topee. You lay under your single fly naked. You soaked your handkerchief in water and put it on your head. But it was dry in five minutes. The more you drank the more you wanted to drink. We were on the edge of the marsh all the way. We used to sit in it. The water was as warm as soup and about the same colour. It was very brackish, and got salter and salter every day. One's body became impregnated with salt. You could scrape it off your arms, and the dried sweat on your shirt was as white as snow. It was worst in the long stretches of shallow water at the edge of the flood; you couldn't bear your hand in this long. It was often so hot at six in the evening that the transport and cavalry horses could not water till ten. Deeper water was a relief when you could get it. We crossed the marsh just before Amara. We had collected a lot of mashhufs from the marsh Arabs, and fitted them into rafts for the transport of guns. Our rifles, kit, and equipment were dumped into bellums. The marsh was half-way up to the knee at the start, and it came up to the waist. At one place for a few yards it was out of our depth. Bellums were brought up here, and men who could not swim had to hang on to them; the others and the horses swam. It was heavy going, on account of the muddy bottom, but more refreshing than that —— sand. When you were tired of walking you could swim. Five were drowned in the swift channels which ran into the canal from the marsh."

The results of the march were proportionate to the

hardships. When I reached Ahwaz a year later, towards the end of May, 1916, the garrison were having an easy time. "The country is too settled," a subaltern in the 23rd Cavalry complained to me. There was not enough "scrapping" to please them. Otherwise existence was very tolerable, and one lived under much the same conditions as in an Indian frontier station. The officers were in houses, the men in stout reed huts. There was a soda-water factory, no shortage of river transport or stores. There were polo, hockey, football, tennis in the evenings, and good shooting for eight months in the year. Life in Ahwaz was very home-like after our rough fare on the Tigris. There were even memsahibs dispensing tea in their own drawing-rooms, which made one feel as if one had stepped into the piping times of peace. The camp was on the right bank of the Karun; the town on the left. It reminded me of a city on the Indus, only the bazaars were roofed, and the Europeans lived inside the city. I found the Consul and his wife in their *serdab*, a kind of vaulted cellar, with ventilation shafts through which the hot air escapes upwards. There one is free from all radiated heat, and the thermometer is 15 degrees lower than outside. I was thankful enough for this refuge from the sun at Maidun-i-Naftun and Shuster, where the inside of one's head feels like the contents of a frying-pan. One forgets the names of one's friends and relatives and how to spell common words; the faculty for connected thought is suspended; then one goes down into the *serdab* and everything comes slowly back again.

Our garrison on the Karun consisted of one regiment of cavalry (the 23rd) and a double company of infantry (the 44th Merwaras), but this small force was quite enough to keep the tribesmen in awe. Very rarely was the monotony of life seasoned for the cavalry by anything in the nature of a scrap. However, in the second week of April news came to Ahwaz that 600 irregular

horse under the Bakhtiari Khans, who had been fighting the Russians, or, rather, hanging on their flanks from Teheran to Kashri Shirin, were returning to their own country, homesick and tired of the continual retreat. Their route lay along the Mendali Bedrah and Deh-i-Luran track, and they would have to cross the Diz River at a point a few miles above Shush, where the 23rd had an outlying squadron seventy miles from their base at Ahwaz. Here, it seemed, were the makings of a pretty scrap. But war in Persia falls into the province of the comic more often than the heroic muse. In addition to our squadron at Shush, and a second which joined them from Ahwaz, we had a small force of friendly Arabs who undertook to cut off the Bakhtiaris' retreat when we attacked. Our cavalry derived much diversion from the antics of these men. Before starting they danced on the sandhills to give themselves heart, then, mounting, they galloped round in little circles, calling upon Allah and firing off their rifles in the air. At the first shot they made off, but they did not entirely desert the scene of action, for after the scrap we found them in the abandoned Bakhtiaris' camp disputing over the loot. The Sagwands, too, a kindred tribe, came in with a delightful Gilbertian touch. They had joined the Bakhtiaris and helped them over the ford, but seeing their friends beaten and the enemy in their settlement, turned on them and actively assisted us in rounding them up. Those of the Bakhtiaris who had not crossed were stripped by their allies the other side of the river and left stark, without a shirt to their backs.

The Bakhtiari himself did not show any better mettle. One has heard a great deal about him as a fighting man, as the "hardy Persian mountaineer" who has preserved his vigour and independence amidst the general decay. But he is no thruster. His military virtues have been much exaggerated. That one squadron at Shush, with

no support within seventy miles, was good enough to deal with any local trouble. Two hundred surrendered and were disarmed; the two Khans and the members of the gendarmerie were retained as prisoners, the others were dismissed.

The Sagwands must have done well, for the belts of the prisoners we took were bulging with gold. One of their Khans, Salar-i-Masud, had 2,000 sovereigns on his horse and mule. I should imagine that the Hun found the Bakhtiaris not very satisfactory allies in the field. Salar-i-Masud was full of complaints. A German officer had told him to go off and hold a distant bridgehead when his horses were tired, and he had refused. The German was rude, so he decamped with all his men, and, what was more, with the Hunnish gold. A currency which was very common in Persia at the time, especially in the neighbourhood of Isfahan, was the English sovereign of 1872. a special mintage which was struck for the French to help them to pay off their indemnity to the Hun. These coins were bright and new, for they had lain in the war chest at Spandau for near on forty-four years. The war was a great thing for the Persian. It filled him with gold and importance without responsibility, as well as material for laughter at the fallacies of our Western civilisation.

The Bakhtiaris seemed injured and surprised that we should have attacked them. They had no quarrel with the British, they explained; they had joined the Turk to fight their hereditary foe. The Persian cannot get rid of the notion that the interests of Russia and Great Britain are antagonistic; it has been their traditional policy to play one off against the other, and it was difficult to persuade them of a common cause.

The Bakhtiaris are a fluctuating political element, and in dealing with them one cannot depend on any central control. Some of them are pro-German because they are anti-Russian; others pro-British because they are anti-

Turk. Gold, of course, is the chief incentive. But, whatever the struggle, the tribesmen will have a stake on either side. Whether it be Shah or constitution, British or German, Bear or Lion, they stand to win in either case. For, whatever happens, one party will come out on top and give the other a hand up. Both will be the stronger for unexpended sinews of war. Naturally enough, the Bakhtiari's vacillating allegiance is secured by the immediate presentment of power, whether in the shape of arms or of gold. We asked Salar-i-Masud why he had supported the Kaiser. He explained that he had visited Berlin, Paris, London and Vienna with his eyes open just before the War, and that he had returned with the impression that the Germans were the most warlike nation. In Berlin, he said, every other man you met was a soldier, whereas in London you hardly ever saw a uniform in the streets. And he described how he had seen two troopers in bright armour mounted on guard in a populous part of the city. It was true that they were fine figures of men, and well mounted; but he had only seen these two, and he noticed they were always surrounded by an interested crowd. His conclusion was that a people to whom soldiers are an object of curiosity cannot be a military race. Doubtless this Khan had material reasons for his conversion to German propaganda.

The Bakhtiaris' sympathies were undoubtedly German, but fortunately their interests are bound up with ours; for there is a great argument in dividends, and the Khans are shareholders in two operating companies controlled by the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. Their income from the wells alone probably exceeds all their other combined revenues of State, and it is yearly increasing. It was with no pro-German zeal that they saw the columns of fire and smoke rise up from the pipes which ought to have been feeding the refineries at Abadan. And in the still more disturbed months when the

Germans were sending out their Mujahidin to preach the Holy War from one end of Persia to the other, the Khans were approached again. "Why be content with shares?" they were asked. "Come in with us, and the whole of this wealth is yours." The tribesmen urged that the oilfields would be no use to them without the company and the engineers. "We will work them for you," the tempter suggested. But the Khans were politely diffident. One old diplomat pointed out to the Huns that they had no ships, and that without a fleet the oil would be valueless as it could not be sold. It was known throughout the Gulf that we had swept the Germans off the sea. For the disappearance of their flag was a phenomenon which even their political missionaries could not explain away.

All through these troublous times the Bakhtiaris were loyal to their contract with the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. The employees in the field were entirely cut off from the south. Two low ranges of hills and the Kharran, the broken ravine country at their foot, altogether a stretch of thirty miles, lay between them and the hostile Bawi, who held the road to Ahwaz. The Bawi, with an instinct common to the Arab plainsman, were afraid to enter the hills. They were still more afraid to engage the Bakhtiari. When the Bawi proposed a raid on the pipe-lines in the Kharran, the Bakhtiari threatened to fall on them, and they desisted. One of the junior Khans remained on the fields all through the trouble with a body of fifty sowars in addition to the permanent tribal guards. These were for local requirements, and could have been supplemented in case of attack. To the north the tribe was all-powerful, and through their territory the Company was in communication with Isfahan.

In supplies the little colony was self-sufficing. They had well-filled storehouses which provided for emergencies of the kind. But money ran short, and to keep off the

shadow of politics and such misgivings as are the invariable accompaniment of discontent it was necessary that the men should be paid. Arabs and Persians especially would have been deeply suspicious of any financial hitch just at this time. It was here that the Bakhtiaris gave a signal proof of their power and willingness to help. They undertook to convoy three caravan loads of cash, amounting to some million krans, down from Isfahan, fifteen days' journey over the hills. Even in the most settled times a Persian road is not a thoroughfare one would choose for the convoy of treasure, but the Bakhtiari muleteers dumped the boxes down on the office steps at Maidun-i-Naftun as casually as if they had been sacks of coal—fifteen hundred tomans in one box; three thousand tomans on one mule. They had dumped them down by the roadside when they halted twice a day for over a fortnight, and not a kran had been touched or a seal broken.

The Bakhtiaris, whatever their political sympathies, helped us through the early spring troubles in 1915. But the crisis in the autumn was much more serious. The Hun Jehad was spreading south. The Shah was on the point of leaving Teheran. The Bakhtiari representative at Isfahan had been won over, and German emissaries were continually with the Khans in their summer quarters at Chiga-kor, pressing them to come to a decision. They temporised to the last moment, hesitating, as they said, "to compromise the neutrality of Persia." No one can be more constitutional than the Bakhtiaris when the moment serves. "Any infringement of our liberty on the part of the British," was the argument, "and we are entirely at your service." And there is not the slightest doubt that if the German *coup d'état* had been brought off at Teheran in November they would have come in against us. This might have meant the abandonment of the oil-fields, as our troops were needed to the last man to rein-

force, and afterwards, as it proved, to attempt the relief of, Townshend on the Tigris. The Germans, once in Maidan-i-Naftun, might have used it as a base for their propaganda in the south; workshops, power-house, engineering plant, everything was on the spot. They might have made an arsenal of it and established wireless. But it is doubtful if they could have stayed there. The entry of Persia would have meant that the main struggle in this theatre of the war must have shifted east. It is even possible that it might have turned out to the Allies' advantage. The Turkish armies would have been drawn farther from their base; an openly hostile Persia would have been easily crushed; and any loss of prestige through ground yielded elsewhere might have been balanced by the consolidation of our authority right up to the Indian frontier.

It seemed the result of masterly diplomacy that with no visible emblem of power the Germans were able to persuade the Persians that they were bound to win the war, and that they were stronger than the Russians and the British whose legions were on the spot. But the campaign was made easy for them by the Persians' hatred of Russia, and in a lesser degree of Great Britain; by the belief, among the tribesmen at least, that the Germans, if not Mohammedans, were the true champions of Islam; and by a lavish and reckless expenditure of gold on a scale that we had never contemplated. The Huns played all these cards. In two days, perhaps one, Persia would have been engulfed if the Russian troops had not reached Kazvin, within a day's march of the capital. Their arrival just turned the scale. The young Shah was on the point of joining the hostile confederates at Isfahan when the British and Russian ambassadors persuaded him to stay and save his country.

Thus the second crisis was passed. I met the inscrutable Khans six months afterwards at Maidun-i-Naftun,

and we sat and chatted amidst the substantial pledges of our *entente*. The Bakhtiaris must be rather proud of the oilfields. We had a view of rigs and derricks, belching shafts and chimneys, workshops, power-house, stores, palaces and club—a bit of Staffordshire translated into the most uncompromising wilderness, and it was all in a way solidly Bakhtiari, the fruit of the soil, and dividend-bringing, every brick and stone the product of the tableland, all power proceeding from the wells. The Il-Begi filled his glass and croaked about the political situation with an amiable twinkle in his eye. "Verdun est pris." "Les Turcs ont repris Erzerum." This was meant as friendly badinage; but all the while one could see that his croakings were thoroughly congenial to him. No doubt the Persian leaflet in his pocket contained even more sensational news, how the Mohammedans had taken Cairo, and because of this the Irish had rebelled, turned out the English and were fighting for a king, though there were only 12,000 left. But the Il-Begi is a shrewd and travelled man, and knows what is what. He emptied our three glasses into his own and drank the contents with one gulp. He played the part of the jovial cynic, saying that even God was tired of the war.

But the Persians were having the time of their lives. It is jolly to light a blaze at which one can warm one's hands, and then discover profit in the embers when one has stamped them out—the profits of arson and salvage at the same time.

CHAPTER XXI

THE HUN IN PERSIA

Our troops were too busy on the Tigris to give much thought to the Persian situation. They might well have been depressed had they known how near things were to a general conflagration from the Turkish border to the Indian hinterland. But our Politicals kept their counsel and did good work. It was in a way salvage work, though they were not responsible for the wreck. In the interior of Persia their hands have always been tied, but in the Gulf, where they have had more freedom, they have never let Great Britain down. For years the tentacles of the German octopus have been insinuating themselves, but claw after claw has been chopped off with firmness and decision. If we have failed at any time it has been when local policy has been overridden by mandates from the Foreign Office, when something or somebody has been thrown overboard to conciliate our friends the Turk and the Hun. But the War brought the Imperial and local outlook into the same focus, and there were districts in the Gulf where it proved a positive blessing.

It was the menace to the oilfields which touched us most nearly in Mesopotamia, but the whole Pan-Islamic movement reacted on the situation. German agents were penetrating Persia from all parts of the compass. Prince Henry of Reuss, with his machine guns over the western border from Kashri Shirin, the Wonkhaus agents in the south, escaped Austrian prisoners from Astrabad in the north, Indian political missionaries—in some cases pro-

fessional Hindu revolutionists disguised as Jehadists—from the east. And these Persian activities were only part of a widespread propaganda which was to embrace Afghanistan, the Turcoman tribes and Baluchis, the Pathans on the Indian frontier, and to stir up mutiny in India itself.

It was no easy thing for the orthodox neutral to receive a scathing comminatory letter from the Ulema of Kerbela or Isfahan, denouncing him as a dependant of Kafirs, living under British protection, and calling upon him to put on the garment of honour. Seyyid Issa, the firebrand of Ram Hormuz, who raised the Chaab against us and lit the torch in Bebehan, writes to Haidar Khan, the Tangistani:

"We write this to you in compliance with the orders of God Almighty, the kind and also stern Avenger. Permit not the history of your glorious family to be stained with the ink of disgrace and the blood of your Mohammedan brothers to be shed for the attainment of the objects of unbelievers."

But the blare of the trumpet call dies away in discordant anti-climax:

"We understand," Seyyid Issa continues, "that telegrams will be sent to you by His Imperial Majesty containing his forgiveness for the past and his promise for your progress in the future, and by the German Legation expressing their satisfaction."

From God Almighty to His Imperial Majesty and the German Legation! With such engaging inconsistency does the Jehadist blow his call to the followers of the Prophet to range themselves with unbelievers. Possibly Seyyid Issa may have believed in the Haji William myth. Undoubtedly many of the vulgar did. In any case, it was a convenient formula. Russia, the eternal shadow cast over the solar lion, and Great Britain, a lesser but now concomitant shade, might both be dispelled by the friendly

new light. All the world and Islam had risen against the opponents of Persian liberty, and rivers of gold were the reward of the faithful and patriotic.

When the call is from an inspired source, and duty, profit and religion point to the same path, few can be proof against the appeal. The Chief Mullah of Kerbela has a vision in the night, in which the martyred Hussein appears and speaks:

"I was a martyr to the sacred cause. Now Mohammedans must wage war against the infidels who have come to the Holy Land. Therefore take a sword from my sanctuary, and a banner from the sanctuary of my standard-bearer and brother, Abul Fazli Abbas, and send them to the Wali of Baghdad."

The "Sedai Islam," a leaflet prepared in Baghdad for dissemination in Iran, tells the Persians how the sword and banner were "removed with reverence and dispatched with ceremony and pomp," and how they were met two miles outside Baghdad and carried in a procession by all the chief officials of the city.

"O Persians! Are we to suppose that all your prayers and breastbeatings, all your religious ceremonies, are vain? Now, when the whole of Islam is threatened by the infidel, such lip service is of little count. Now is the time to give yourselves to the Holy Cause. If you shrink from the sacrifice, what answer will you render the Prophet and the Holy Martyr on the Judgment Day?"

The propaganda of Islam has a Biblical directness and force. But many of the letters from the Ulemas were forged. Some of the most venomous broadsheets were written by professional Hindu revolutionists. The Jehadist manifestoes were as often spurious as genuine. Kerbela, whence the martyred Hussein's voice resounded to the limits of Iran, was soon to be fanatically anti-Turk. In May, 1916, there was a rising in the town, much civilian blood was shed, and the Turkish guns were

trained on the holy shrine and minarets. The guardians of Hussein's tomb would have welcomed a British gunboat on the river. In June the Sherif of Mecca took the field against the renegade Caliph. It needed clever trimming on the part of the Hun to keep in with the Sunni and the Shiah at the same time.

But the most unfruitful branch of the Hun's propaganda was the department which aimed at the seduction of the Indian sepoy. With the one exception of the trans-frontier Pathan, who is not a subject of the King, his missionary efforts met with poor response. The notorious Wassmuss travelled with bales of inflammatory leaflets, exhausting the eloquence of five languages in his appeal to the Indian Army to rise and kill their British officers. Long before the War the Germans had their Indian agents at Bushire, who put up their fellow countrymen when they came to the Gulf and instilled into them "true political ideas."

The intrigues of the firm of Wonkhaus in the Persian Gulf during the last twenty years are too well known to need repetition here. When General Delamain's brigade reached Bahrein in October, 1914, papers were discovered with the agent Harling, giving accurate details of the composition of the force. The report had been written and dispatched by dhows to the German Consuls at Bushire and Basra four hours after we had arrived at the island. The German intelligence system was well established; the machinery of propaganda ran smoothly from the first. The "Fars," the "Hayat," the "Tazianah," and the "Intiqam" at Shiraz, Nizam Sultan's leaflet at Kermanshah, the "Sedai Islam," printed in Persian at Baghdad and distributed throughout Persia, disseminated the German and Turkish point of view. The redoubtable Wassmuss and Listermann were the arch-intriguers in the south. It was Wassmuss who afterwards incited the Tangistanis to attack Bushire and to round up the Eng-

lish residents in Shiraz. It was Listermann who attempted to stir up a general massacre of the British at Bushire. It was no time for half measures when it had come to the point of murdering civilians in their beds. Early in March, 1915, every German in Bushire was deported to India, and it became necessary for a time to take over and administer the port.[1] Soon every trace of the Hun was eliminated from the coast—German names, German ships, German people; but in the interior there was much trouble brewing.

The occupation of Bushire gave Wassmuss his trump card. The Persians were bitterly incensed, and he had the most inflammable material at hand in the tribesmen of the hinterland. Here was the evidence he needed to prove our sinister designs on the unhappy country of his adoption, and here were the men best fitted to draw the sword in its defence. Time out of mind the Tangistanis have been the scourge of southern Persia and a terror to the peaceful caravan; and their inhospitable country, hospitable only to Wassmuss and his gold, lay between Bushire and the British colony at Shiraz.

The quality of tact has been denied the Hun, but there is no doubt that he is able to practise the arts of conciliation on the lower rungs of the ladder, however truculent he may be when he appears on the top. In Persia one could not but admire the adroitness with which he combined the contradictory rôles of fugitive and protector. The persuasive tongue of Wassmuss resounded in the proclamations of the Khans of Tangistan in which these unregenerate highwaymen professed themselves shocked at the violation of Persian neutrality and demanded the restitution of their innocent "guests." The "guests" were the same Germans and Austrians who had brought their machine-guns over the Turkish border,

[1] Bushire was restored to the Persian Government on October 16th, 1915, Persia having accepted the terms of the British Government.

flooded the country with inflammatory leaflets, and, against the express orders of the Persian Government, set up their wireless installation at Isfahan. Allied with these champions of Persian neutrality were the Turks, who, until the Russians drove them out, had occupied Kermanshah, overrun the province of Azerbaijan, captured Tabriz, and put the inhabitants of the city to the sword.

For months Wassmuss and his crew had everything their own way in Tangistan. On July 12th, 1915, a party of the tribesmen with whom the Huns were living advanced to attack Bushire and ambushed one of our cavalry patrols. Major Oliphant and Captain Rawling and two sowars were killed, and two sowars wounded. Towards evening the main body of the regiment got into touch with the tribesmen, who withdrew before dawn after keeping up a desultory fire all night. The next attack was on December 9th, when the Tangistanis got inside our outpost lines and fired into the reserve camp and Residency, killing one havildar and a sowar. They attacked again on the 30th, but were driven off, losing several killed and wounded. There were no casualties on our side.

Our garrison at Bushire was well able to look after itself, but the small British colony at Shiraz was isolated and undefended. On October 10th the British Consul, Colonel O'Connor, and all British subjects were arrested by the gendarmerie (who explained that they were acting under orders and that war was about to be declared by Persia) and removed to Ahram in the Tangistani country. The terms offered for their release were the return of all German and Persian prisoners taken on Persian soil, with the restitution of their effects, and the evacuation of Bushire by British troops. All through the summer O'Connor and his party were interned in the fortress of Zair Khidir Khan at Ahram, a bare twenty miles from

our garrison at Bushire. The Indian Government were opposed to a punitive expedition. And they had good reason. We were strong enough to attack and disperse the Tangistanis if there had been any hope of their making a stand. But the odds were that they would have retired into the hills at the first alarm, and they might have laid violent hands on the captives. Thus, when the German cause was declining elsewhere in Persia, Wassmuss and his companions were still at large with the rebel tribes of the Bushire hinterland. But the arch-conspirator was near the end of his tether. Having no more gold, his influence was on the wane. The Khans of the tribes who harboured him were showing signs of penitence; they had been proclaimed outlaws by the Persian Government; through the closing of the caravan road to the coast they were beginning to feel the pinch of scarcity; and the source of all supplies had been sucked dry as a desert well. In August, 1916, after nearly eleven months' captivity, O'Connor and his party were released in exchange for certain disturbers of the peace who had been deported earlier in the year. But the real crisis was passed ten months before, in November, 1915, when the *coup d'état* by which Persia was to be dragged into the War, even as Turkey twelve months before, was foiled. Russia marched her troops from Kazvin to within a day's march of the capital, bringing to bear the only argument the hostile confederates could understand. On November 15th the young Shah threw the Germans overboard, and Persia was saved.

Northern and western Persia were cleared as the Russians swept south, defeating the rebels at Kum (December 15th) and Hamadan (December 21st) and driving the Turks back to their own frontier from Kermanshah. April saw the beginning of the collapse in the eastern provinces. The Governor of Kerman, in consequence of certain outrages, expelled the Germans from

the town, disarmed the gendarmerie, and sent them under escort to Shiraz. The Germans and Austrians who were expelled from Kerman were attacked by a tribal force at Arsenjan, captured, and dispatched to Teheran. The Germans suffered defeat about the same time in another encounter at Sirjan, when four Austrians and one German were killed, and twenty Austrians captured. Zugmeyer's party was attacked by the Bakhtiaris near Baft, and Dr. Biach was captured, sent to Bandar Abbas, and is now a prisoner in India. Next Shiraz was purged. All the gendarmerie were put under arrest. The editors of the inflammatory leaflets, the "Hayat," "Tazianah," and "Intiqam," were seized. In May, Seyyid Issa, the notorious firebrand of Ram Hormuz, surrendered to the Bakhtiaris, and Mr. Grahame and the British colony were reinstalled in Isfahan. Neidermeyer and his gang alone penetrated to Kabul, but the Amir knew how to deal with these. With the entry of General Sykes and his Persian gendarmerie into Kerman, one of the last centres of propaganda was swept clean.

Thus it was the achievement of a handful of Huns to introduce war, brigandage, loot, and murder into one of the few countries in the world which might have enjoyed peace. Happily they discovered that lies and assassination, though useful in disturbing the equilibrium of a neutral country, cannot be made the permanent basis of authority. But Germany's methods in Persia have a peculiar interest, since they offer a model, on a small scale, of her political machinery as a whole. Nowhere else have the threads of her intrigues been laid so bare; nowhere have the motives, source, method and effect of her propaganda been so transparent. The specific is always more illuminating than the general; and to follow the machinations of the firm of Wonkhaus before the War, or the comings and goings of the agents Wassmuss and Neidermeyer during the first eighteen months of it, is to read the

history of the nation in the individual. The secret of Germany's strength is that every Hun unit fits in with her general scheme, whether by temperament or training, as compactly as a cell in a natural organism. To the Persians the Hun was a champion of democracy as well as of the integrity of small nations. "Germans and democrats" became a common catchword in the south, and the Persians linked the words in all innocence, so that to the uninstructed "democrat" must have come to mean "an employer of assassins who is prepared to pay a high wage." "Democracy" was a strange standard for the Hun to fly; but he is adaptable, and for the moment autocracy was not in the air. "Islam" was the flag he was most constantly waving in the eyes of the credulous. He wore the fez in Baghdad and the Persian dress in Isfahan, squatted in the Eastern manner, fasted in Ramazan, and subscribed to the national faith, Sunni or Shiah, according to the country of his adoption. In a Moslem country his propaganda is frankly anti-Christian; and he penetrated Iran from end to end, accompanied by a troop of Mujahidin who preached the Holy War from Meshed to Kermanshah and proclaimed the advent of the "Army of Deliverance."

Only a very brief abstract of German activities in Persia is possible in a single chapter; the full story would fill volumes. But in Bushire, Ahwaz, Shuster, I gathered a few pictures which are worth preserving as they suggest a broader canvas.

For a long time Isfahan was the centre of intrigue. On February 4th, 1915, Dr. Pugin arrived with a semi-royal escort and hoisted the German and Turkish flags. Before evening the German flag was torn to shreds, but it was soon flying again. In May the wireless was installed. Protests, orders, expostulations, poured in from Teheran, but the Governor-General was dilatory in putting them into effect. And it would have been a pity to

remove this toy. For the voice of the War Lord was heard daily in Isfahan speaking with the elect. He told of colossal disasters to the Slav, the destruction of the British Navy, the failure of the Bank of England, and the extinction of France.

Farther south, Wassmuss had a dummy wireless of his own, and he too conferred with the All Highest in the camp of the simple Tangistanis, drawing sparks with a magnet in the night. Mysterious messages came through. The Protector of Islam had an eye that saw as far as Providence; the Khans sat figuratively on his right hand; their honoured names were on his lips; and the forays of Sheikh Hussein and Zair Khidhir assumed the proportions of a crusade.

The comic muse still held the stage at Isfahan on May 20th, when large crowds flocked to the cemetery of Takht-i-Rishad to see a German Zeppelin arrive laden with sugar—symbolic freight—from the north. The townspeople searched the sky with strained necks until dark, when they returned home disappointed, much to the diminution of German prestige.

But things were to move more quickly in the city, and the tragic muse was to take her turn on the boards. When Seiller came the truculent Pugin was discredited as not truculent enough. "What have you done for us?" he was asked. "Nothing at all!" The man stood a self-confessed weakling, all words and bluff, when he should have been the father of riot and assassination. Clearly a more resourceful head, a livelier propaganda was needed. On May 18th von Hayer, manager of the Russian Bank, was shot dead as he was driving home from the Russian Consulate, where he had dined. An Arab in the employ of the German Consul was called in by the local authorities for examination in connection with the murder, but the man was suddenly spirited away by Seiller to Teheran. Soon afterwards Mr. Grahame, the British Vice-Consul,

was shot at and wounded as he was driving through the streets, and his Indian orderly was killed.

In the meanwhile the flag of deliverance had reached Kerman. The townspeople flocked to meet the Germans Zugmeyer and Greisinger, sacrificed a sheep and a cow in their honour; and in spite of the Governor-General, who protested, the German and Turkish flags were hoisted on a house outside the city. Later the tireless Zugmeyer incited the people to crowd into the mosque and declare a Jehad and kill all English and Russians. The British subject Farrukh Shah was murdered, and the murderer, as at Isfahan, took refuge with the Germans. The Persians have a conveniently medieval system of *bast*, or inviolate sanctuary, which exactly fits in with the Hunnish renascence of the era of assassination.

"A small party of Englishmen," wrote Zugmeyer to a certain chief, "have come to Dehaneh Baghi. It will be very easy to crush them. Proceed at once, kill them and take possession of all their property, arms and ammunition, and send me one rifle of each kind possessed by them as a specimen." There is something medieval in this direct appeal. It is murder become routine, not war.

Follow the agent X., a respectable merchant, who escaped from Basra when our troops attacked Fao. We find him next at Lingah, where a forged proclamation, purporting to come from an Alim of Kerbela, is read out in a coffee-shop in the bazaar. The call to the Jehad was written on the spot after X. had taken refuge in the town. He leaves Lingah secretly for the Bastak district, and it is from here that the party is traced who made the murderous attack on the four Europeans at Kishm, creeping up to the tent where they were sitting and firing on them at close range. The Englishmen, employees of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, were able to drive their assailants off. But here again the motive

was murder. There was a certain price on an English head.

But there are other iniquities which should be remembered as examples of the tares that spring up in the path of the Hun. There was an incident at Kerman. A small thing at first sight—no more than a song sung in the schools by the children of the town and published in a local sheet after the English had been expelled. Yet, when one looks into it, more damning to the Hun than murder or rape, since it is the bitter fruit of a seed which, if scattered, would make human relations impossible.

There was no unfriendliness between the British and Kermanis until the Germans came. We were liked and trusted. The missionaries fulfilled their benevolent scheme of life and reaped the fruit in the affection of the people. Then the Hun comes in, and this is what the children sing in the schools:

"Give thanks that by the zeal of our patriots
Our native land has become clean.
Our dishonest and unlucky guests
Brought misfortune to all.
One came with a Testament in his hand,
Saying, 'God has a Son.'
Another was an artful doctor
Who arranged beds in rows,
And said, 'My love for sick people
Has made this my duty'
(That he might prove a scorpion to our land).

"Another opened a school
That he might train the ignorant
In such a manner that they should not understand
His countrymen's design on our country.

"Another brought silver and gold in handfuls,
Saying, 'I have much of this.
Give me pure gold
And I will give you pretty pieces of paper
Which you can sell in your country's bazaar.'

"Another was a Consul.
He put a yellow and blue device (lion and unicorn)
Over his door,
And spoke bitter and violent words
Like an enemy.

"Their departure is welcome.
May no sign of remembrance of them remain.
May their road be dark and obscure.
May Persia remain all Persian,
The abode of Islam and Mohammedans."

Germany's propaganda in the East never received the attention it deserved. Those who shrug their shoulders and hesitate to believe the iniquities of Louvain or Gerbéviller will find here corroborative evidence in support of the accepted estimate of the mind of the Hun. The only difference is that the Persian murders were perpetrated by agents in cold blood, and had not the same provocation as excesses committed in the blind rage of war.

The events of Isfahan and Kerman were repeated at Yezd and Shiraz and over the greater part of Persia. It was the same story of bribery and assassination, forged proclamations and spurious Jehads. Both the Christian and Moslem religions were debased for political ends. Our own Moslem subjects would have scant respect for Englishmen who proved themselves such easy and interested converts and profaned Islam with the mummeries of Wassmuss and Neidermeyer, appealing to ignorance and fanaticism and stirring up evil passions for selfish ends. The Hun's hypocrisy was based on a desperate opportunism; his Islamic bubble soon burst; and every month that the War was protracted Germany's mask became the more transparent. If she wishes to establish an empire in Asia she will have to mend her ways. For no government that intrigues with religion, cynically playing off sect against sect, will endure for a single generation in the East.

CHAPTER XXII

THE GARDEN OF EDEN

It is the oldest country in the world, but you will find little or nothing that is old in it within 350 miles of the sea. On the Euphrates side Ur of the Chaldees has left some perceptible undulations in the mud. Up the Tigris the Arch of Ctesiphon is the only monument of antiquity that stands. Ezra's Tomb is not really Ezra's tomb, and the Garden of Eden, if there is any truth in legend, is changed beyond recognition. Five of us, a padre, a doctor, a regimental officer, a Supply and Transport man and myself, ought to know, for we were moored to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil for the greater part of the last week in June. We were all bound for Nasiriyeh, on the Euphrates; and waited, at first expectantly, afterwards with little hope, for a problematical General in whose existence we had ceased to believe.

To spend the longest day of the year in the best place should be the hedonist's economical ideal, yet here we were on June 21st in the Seat of Bliss, sparing no commiseration for our first parents who were driven out by the Angel with the Flaming Sword, rather feeling great pity for ourselves.

Qurna, Kurnah, or Gornah, as it is variably called, the reputed Sumerian Paradise, lies at the junction of the Tigris and the old channel of the Euphrates. The new channel flows into the Shatt-el-Arab at Garmat Ali, a few miles above Basra, but it is the old channel that serves for our line of communication with the Euphrates force. The water is clear and sluggish as a Norfolk river. There

seems to be no current at all, the muddy stream of the Tigris receives no purification from it, but simply holds it back where it impinges, leaving a clear margin. The two streams barely mix.

The palm trees and the fig leaf were the only paradisaical things we found in Eden. Even the serpent was invisible, though his works remain and the knowledge of evil thrives preposterously. Man is still chastised in this spot, and we had reason to be thankful that the longest day was followed by the shortest night. Our pyjamas began to sweat before we put them on. They were wet, not with dew, but with the perspiration of the night, the exudations of the palm groves. We neither slept nor were thoroughly awake. We flung open our mosquito curtains and threw off our pyjama jackets, for the air seemed too heavy for insects. But the hour of the sand-flies was only postponed. They came towards midnight, and perished in our sweat, like flies in marmalade.

We pulled down our nets and prayed for a breeze. The sky had all the hard beauty and repose of the divine and implacable as it is presented in the features of the Jain Tirthankaras. The moon was up and the darkness dwindled into grey spaces between the stars. The Milky Way spanned the two horizons, and was fed by great tributaries of molten lead. To the parboiled fancy, which this half-sleep in Eden engenders, they became a web of white mosquitoes with stings like sparks, falling upon our curtains, reinforcements of the divine wrath, a ladder of torture leading down from an inverted hell.

At five the sun came licking over the horizon again to recharge the atmosphere that had lost nothing of its retained heat during the night. A message came early in the morning that the General had not left Ali Gharbi. We could not start that day, and it was very improbable that we should get away the next.

The great argument for Providence is that there is

always a term to unprovoked evils, when the menacing hand is removed, and we remember that it is God's will that we should be chastened but not utterly destroyed. At ten o'clock a breeze sprang up and our interest in things revived. Three Sikhs slid down the burning side of the ship on the rope fenders and hung there with their heads just out of water for hours, still as muggers or tortoises, their long hair floating in the stream. I went ashore with the S. and T. man and the regimental officer; the doctor and the padre were busy burying or restoring the victims of the night. Two more graves were being dug in the British cemetery across the Euphrates. From the deck we had seen stretchers passing under the palms, and in the heat of the night we had pitied the men who bore the weight more than the stiff figures they carried. I heard a man in a gunboat hard by bellowing like a heifer. He was unconscious, and they were wrapping him in ice. The little *Dryfly*, which had just come up from Basra, was the only boat on the river with any ice—and there was none to be had on shore. We would have given days of our life, lumps of our pay, for one long bubbly iced drink. The padre told me that three times during the night he had entirely evaporated, but that towards dawn the humid atoms had collected themselves by some miracle of attraction. Thus he had survived to minister to minds and bodies in greater peril of dissolution.

Any movement of the air is restorative. Now that a tiny breeze had sprung up it was not too hot to dispute the identity of the Biblical tree. The S. and T. man said that it was the trunk to which our paddle steamer was moored, and such was the general opinion. But this tree was a siris, with yellow bean-pods, and I leaned to a gnarled and thorny bush downstream, a kind of prickly plum, with a telegraph pole in it. This, I argued, bore some kind of fruit—far from seductive, it is true, but it might have deteriorated. Evidently Eden is not what it

was. We inquired of the people, but found local tradition confused or indifferent.

We explored the streets up to Rib Road. Eve's Walk leads into Charing Cross, and Serpent's Alley, of course, into Temptation Square, a small inset in the houses by the quay where half a dozen benches are protected from the sun by matting on reed supports. Temptation for the Arabs takes the form of tinned pineapple, Aden cigarettes, canned salmon, and the like, which repeat the unhealthy process of sophistication that was so disastrous to our first parents. The little market was almost deserted. Barely a shadow cut the white earth. The folk in the café sprawled listlessly. There comes a season when it is too sultry even for the Arab to squat, when, one adhesive member abjuring the other, he sits on his high bench with his feet dangling apathetically apart in the air.

Some of the houses on the river front bear the mark of shot and shell. They were held by the Turks when we took the place in December, 1914. There were snipers at every window, and our troops were exposed to a heavy fusillade as they advanced under cover of the palms the other side of the river. We cleared Mazeera village on December 7th, and carried the enemy's lines all along the left bank. They made for their boats upstream and decamped. The 104th found two abandoned *mahailas* where the Turkish fleet had been, and crossed by these. In the meanwhile the sappers were building a flying bridge three miles lower down, by which the 110th were able to cross. These two regiments now held Qurna in their hands. The Turks, mostly Anatolians, a good stubborn breed, had to fight it out or surrender. They were between the devil and the deep sea—the Arab and the British—for their battalions on the left bank had steamed off with all their ships, and the tribesmen, their allies of the day before, would give them short shrift if they fol-

lowed on foot. Before dark they had abandoned their position by the brick kilns. There were parleyings during the night between the two camps; and among the Turks much poring over a thumb-marked and dog-eared copy of the Hague Convention in English and French. It was found the next morning, December 9th, on the Governor's table open at "The Surrender of Townships," when the 104th and 110th marched in and received the piled arms of the garrison. We captured Subhi Bey, late Wali of Basra, 1,034 prisoners of war and four guns.

The actions which led up to the capture of Eden were fought in the fresh, clear cold air of December mornings, but the second affair at Qurna, when we drove the Turks from the islands they occupied in the flooded area above the town, took place under the same atmospheric blanket of sweat and heat that was stretched over us during the longest day of the year. On May 31st, 1915, we fought an amphibious[1] action which probably has no parallel in military records. We collected all the *bellums* in Basra, five hundred or more, and allotted them to one brigade. In this strange armoured craft with iron shields in the centre we advanced like the vikings of old against the enemy's fortified islands. On June 1st the Turks were in full retreat up the river. This brilliant little marsh battle was Townshend's first action in Mesopotamia, and the beginning of the series of victories which carried our small British force up to the Arch of Ctesiphon and within eighteen miles of Baghdad.

We suffered more casualties from heat-stroke in the action than from shot or shell. Nevertheless, the most memorable thing about it was the endurance of our troops. Poling all the morning through thick rushes, wading through water and mud waist-deep, might have been fatal as a mere pleasure jaunt in an atmosphere whose unaided hostility to the human system fills cemeteries and keeps

[1] See Chapter I., p. 15.

doctors and padres busy. But the lust of battle is a great restorer, and in victory the spirit carries along the flesh. It is better to fight in a climate like this than to moralise or think. The men who evicted the Turks from the Sumerian Paradise have happier recollections of it than the draft fresh from home who passed through on the longest day of the year and left their toll behind.

As the profane trooper said, "It would take no bloomin' swords to turn me out of this."

Out of a draft of eighty British cavalry who came up with us from Basra twenty went down the first night. They were to have marched the next morning by road, but when we left Qurna they were still there. The accursed climate had them in its grip. During the long months when there was no fighting the drain on our young blood continued. The tax and toll we had to pay for occupation was as heavy as in January, April, or March. Mesopotamia is a sinister, pestilential land. Not only has she devoured her own empires and kingdoms born of the soil, Ur of the Chaldees, the Assyrian Nineveh, three dynasties of Babylon, Ctesiphon of the Chosroes; she has laid her blight on the greatest Empires of the West. It was in the malarious swamps of the Euphrates that Alexander caught the fever that cut short his life; it was at Ctesiphon that Julian and his Roman legions lost the Empire of the East.

CHAPTER XXIII

NASIRIYEH

THE country visible from the lower reaches of the Euphrates in the neighbourhood of the Hamar Lake and Nasiriyeh is the richest in Mesopotamia, and by far the most pleasing to the eye. In May and June all this land is inundated; the highest ground in a village is not a foot above flood level, and most of the inhabitants have taken to their boats, leaving their reed huts standing in water. The spaciousness of these dwellings, which are 60 feet long, built of three thicknesses of reeds bent into the curve of a bow, points to the prosperity of the marsh Arabs. Half a dozen of them would house a tribe, and they are modelled on the generous scale of Ctesiphon. In most of our camps on the Euphrates flank we have adopted the architecture of the country; our sepoys have learnt the trade from the Arab, and make their own shelters. The high-stacked floating islands of brown reed, which provide material for the matting, are a feature in the landscape. The living rushes stretch for miles on either bank. It is a green country, and, what makes things more homelike, the willows increase until they become almost as plentiful as the palms. One crosses the Hamar Lake into the swift and tortuous Haqiqah channel which connects with the main stream of the Euphrates. Here one enters a land of gardens and cultivation; the villagers are transplanting seedling rice, and the fatness of the land becomes apparent in the broad, strong towers which lie like Saxon churches under the palm clumps at all points of the horizon.

There is generally a bed with a mosquito curtain on the roof. Not even the thick skin of the marsh Arab is proof against the Mesopotamian fly.

The more the Arab belongs to the swamp the more degenerate he is. *Mashhufchis*, or "canoe folk," is a term of contempt on the lips of the proud Bedouin or Shawayih, and the amphibious tribes of the Hamar Lake are regarded by the riders of camels and asses as touching the bottom of the scale. Every island in this inundation is the scene of perennial strife. Anarchy is normal. There is no village which is not a battlefield. Every sheikh is against his neighbour, brother against brother; and there is no loyalty within the community. If two men fall out in the same tribe one of them will call in other tribes against the rival in his own. Since plunder is their livelihood they are the natural enemies of authority. They have fired on the Turkish flag as a matter of principle for generations; and the Ottoman official travelling on the Euphrates has found it safer to conceal the insignia of office. For a long time they cut our telegraph wires and attacked our convoys; and it was only after much punishment that they began to learn wisdom.

The marsh Arab is not a swashbuckler for love of adventure, like the Pathan. He prefers disorder for its commercial uses. Common sense rules him more than sentiment. And that is why Politicals who know him foresee a corrective of anarchy in the opening out of new forms of enrichment. They think he is likely to accept conditions which bring him in wealth through improvement of land, irrigation, and communications. But he has first to be convinced. A young administrator who had served on the North-West Frontier put the case to me like this. "For the sake of example, take 20 rupees a month as the average income of the Arab or Pathan who plays for his own hand. Offer the

Pathan 50 rupees a month and our ordered system with the Magistrate, Policeman and Collector round the corner, and he will scoff at it. Offer the Arab—I mean the *Mashhufchi*, of course—21 rupees; prove that it is secure, and he will probably take it, provided you don't interfere with his family affairs." Interference was the policy of the Turks. They were afraid of the sheikhs becoming too strong. They would set up one chief against another, and when he got too much power, a third against the first. *Divide et impera* was their rule. They tried to break up the tribal system; it is our policy to maintain it. We prefer concentration of authority and one responsible man with whom we can deal. The administrative machinery is the same, only the ideals are different. Our *Kaim-makam* (political officer) retains the old title and deals with the same tribes as his Turkish predecessor did. We collect revenue, mainly land revenue, on the old basis through the chiefs. The system is essential. For unless we collect taxes the sheikhs have no status to do so, and if they lose this hold on their people, their authority and the whole tribal system must collapse together.

The Haqiqah channel runs into the main stream of the Euphrates some twenty-five miles below Nasiriyeh. Here we are in the heart of the Muntafik, who form the largest and most powerful confederacy in Iraq. Nasiriyeh is a modern town. It was built as an improvement on Suq-esh-Sheyukh forty-five years ago by Nasir Pasha, the great chief of the Muntafik, who held the seventy odd tribes of the confederacy in the hollow of his hand. It bears the mark of his greatness; for unlike any other town in Mesopotamia, it is laid out in broad parallel streets through which carriages, if there were any, could pass abreast. We took the town on July 26th, 1915, and our garrison there formed the left wing of our army in Mesopotamia.

Nasiriyeh is a strategic point, for it commands the approach to Basra by the Euphrates; it is one of the gates from Central Asia into Iraq; to hold it controls the importation of arms and supplies into the interior; it is a base for expeditions against recalcitrant tribes, and it closes the Shatt-el-Hai against a flank attack from the Tigris. There are 20,000 to 30,000 fighting men distributed along the banks of the Shatt-el-Hai. Hold both ends and they are quiet. It is to determine the allegiance of these tribes that the bottling up of the channel is necessary, as well as to guard against a descent upon the Euphrates from Kut-el-Amara. For four or five months of the year the stream is navigable for *bellums* from the Tigris to a point near Shatrah. Here the Bad'ah channel on the left bank takes off two-thirds of the water of the Hai into the Hamar Lake.

But Samawa rather than Nasiriyeh is the natural outpost on the Euphrates for a force invading Mesopotamia from the south; for if left outside our sphere the place would become a centre of Turkish intrigue. There is no other town of importance on either branch of the Euphrates until Diwaniyeh is reached on the Shatt-el-Hilleh, or Najaf near the Shatt-el-Hindieh. Also Samawa is a big trade centre for barley, ghi, and wool, and it was the gate of the caravan route from Najd into Iraq.

The problem of an advance on Baghdad by the Euphrates was simplified for us in 1916 by the fact that the next step forward would take us into the Shiah strongholds of Kerbela and Najaf, where the most bitter resentment existed against the Turks. In May there was a rising at Kerbela, and on the 14th of the month the Turks brought their guns to bear on the sacred tombs and minarets, and killed some 130 of the townspeople, including women and children and nine British Indians. A member of the Ulema, speaking at Najaf, said: "In committing these atrocities the Turks have done gratis

for the English what it would have cost England a million of money to achieve for herself." Financial oppression and compulsory enlistment for military service aggravated the indignation. There were 70,000 people in the holy cities, all of one mind and ready to assist the British against the Turks in the capture of Baghdad. Towards the end of May feeling became so strong that an appeal was made to the British to "send four or five gunboats with 100 men in each" as far as Battah, where a force under a friendly sheikh would meet the boats and escort them to Najaf. But the time was not ripe.

During the first week of July, when I visited the town, Nasiriyeh was still an island. Ur of the Chaldees, ten miles to the west, was inaccessible on foot. According to the Arabs 1915 was a phenomenal flood year; in 1916 we hoped for normal conditions, but the floods were again phenomenal, and it was only by the exertions of our troops, aided by the townspeople, that the place was saved.

During the critical period while the embankment was being made orders were in force that all the male inhabitants of Nasiriyeh must work on the bund between 6 A.M. and 10 A.M., and between 3 P.M. and 7 P.M.; that all shops in the bazaar must be closed during these hours, and that anyone found in the streets or houses during working hours would be imprisoned till the floods subsided. The reasonableness of this order was well understood; it is in accord with the Eastern tradition of a strong and just Government. The only thing which puzzled the Arab was the last clause in the proclamation. "Every man or woman who works will receive eight annas a day." The Turkish officers never paid for work. They even commandeered provisions in the bazaar, where they were in a sufficiently strong position to bully the shopkeepers.

An interesting feature of our occupation was the

enrolment of the Nasiriyeh Arab Scouts. All the local tribes are represented in the N.A.S., and a score of the Sa'dun, the ruling family of the Muntafik. The Scouts have proved very useful in patrol work and military intelligence.

Nasiriyeh, when we first occupied it during the flood season, was more than a physical island; it was an island in an abstract sense, a small cosmos isolated in chaos, but a cosmos that was always extending its bounds. Outside the walls of the town the anarchy that had ruled for generations was rife; inside was peace and content. Yet we know nothing of the arts of frightfulness; we were probably not frightful enough. When the *Shushan* steamed into Nasiriyeh ahead of the force on July 24th, 1915, the banks were lined with Arabs holding up their hands in sign of submission. When they discovered that the *Shushan* was alone they picked up their rifles and opened fire. A couple of shells, one on the barracks, soon silenced them. A Gurkha sentry was shot in the streets during the night. Nobody swung for it. Since this day there has been practically no crime.

The merchant, landowner, shopkeeper, and artizan appreciate a settled government; and the Arab, as a rule, with all his failings, has a saving common sense which tumbles to expediency so soon as it becomes apparent. A student of British methods could not do better than pass a day in a town like Nasiriyeh a year after occupation. Spend a morning in the court of the Military Governor. In the seat of authority you will probably find a very young officer, one of the type who has been in the habit of spending his leave before the War in Persia, Arabia, or the Himalayas, shooting strange beasts, picking up strange dialects and studying the ways of stranger people. Here you have empire in the egg; and such young men—subalterns generally "acting captains," or captains generally "acting majors"—are indispensable

during the incubation of any new imperial brood. Decision is a habit with them; they are used to hard cases; they have acquired an insight into obscure motives. Their judgments are quick and summary, free of pedantry, and seldom hampered by doubts and hesitations. And the proof of this system is its popularity. In the mornings the approach to the military Governor's court is crowded; you will meet in the passage haughty Arabs, meek Sabæans, furtive-looking Jews, mysterious women wrapped from head to foot in black weeds. Here are some of the problems they submit to the decision of youth:

Enter Mohammad Ali. He has lost his seal. Decree: "Proclaim by beat of drum in the bazaar."

Enter Shafraz Hussain. He claims a horse from Shaukat, now in jail. Decree: Two thieves fall out; Court refuses to act.

Enter Sabhi (Sabæan) Mukhtar and priest. Complaint: That the Sabæan girls are all marrying Mohammedans and the race is in danger of dying out. Petition: That the Governor may summon all the Sabæan ladies of Nasiriyeh and address them on this matter; doubtless they will be persuaded to change their ways. Or, if they persist in error, that a law may be passed prohibiting such undesirable alliances. Decree: Sabhi Mukhtar and priest informed that the Sabæans must settle their own affairs.

Enter a *Mashhufchi*. Petition: Licence to export five dead bodies (for interment at the Holy Shrine) and six prostitutes to Najaf. Decree: Granted.

Enter (a) Fatima, veiled and shrouded in the prevalent black. (b) Fatima's husband. Complaint: Fatima's husband has confiscated her house and jewellery and cow, beaten her and turned her out of doors. She unfolds a pitiful tale. But the voice proceeding from the black bundle is the voice of a shrew. Altercation ensues. The

husband is a browbeaten creature. There are faults on both sides—chiefly the woman's, whose lies are the more gross and palpable. The end of it all is that she shrieks and gesticulates, and so generally gives herself and her shrewish temper away that she is given a week's imprisonment for contempt of court.

Most of the morning is taken up with family disputes, maintenance allowances, divorce, and the like. A Jewish woman complains that her husband has deserted her and her child. Decree: Husband to live with wife or pay her eight annas a day; woman to report again in eight days.

Applicant is mother of a girl who wishes to remarry, her husband being reported dead or a prisoner of war in India. Decree: Inquiries to be made at internment camp, and if the husband is not traced the girl to be permitted to marry again.

Wife charges husband with frequently and undeservedly chastising her. Husband agrees to give wife a pair of earrings worth three medjidiehs and not to beat her any more; the pair depart amicably.

In one case a husband and wife came to court with tales of domestic strife, and the judge noted that the name of a third party was continually cropping up in their complaints. At last the husband disclosed the root of the evil. "I do not wish to divorce my wife," he said, "but I cannot endure that the mother of my wife should dwell in the house." The Governor's advice, "Remove the mother-in-law," delivered with the authority of a decree, was acted on with no great reluctance on either side, and the issue was peace.

It augurs well for future relations that families should be so ready to confide their troubles to a judge who is not only very youthful, but a stranger to them in accents and mien and habit of thought. A large proportion of the cases which come to court are domestic; crime is

rare; claims for compensation frequent—damages to crops and date trees, or advances to be recovered. Debts as a rule are admitted and poverty pleaded. An oath on the Koran before the Kazi generally satisfies the other party, but in important cases the man must go and testify at El Kadhar. Then there are charity petitions—old age pensions, gratuities to the blind and widows, and maintenance of the wives of prisoners of war.

I was told, and it is probably true or the courts would not be so crowded, that the Arabs regard our justice as prompt and summary; cheap, and at the same time final; capable of error, but not of corruption. The Turkish system was too cumbrous; it was difficult to get a decree executed; and the balance of the scales would not respond to a lean purse. The general impression seems to be that the British officer at the seat of judgment may not be a Solomon, but that he is more often right than wrong, that he does not keep you waiting, and that he costs nothing to approach. This last advantage may have something to do with the filling of the courts; for no one is indifferent to the privilege of getting for nothing something for which he has been in the habit of paying a great deal.

Turkey's mistake in Mesopotamia has been her attempt at the Ottomanisation of the country. This was the deliberate policy of the Committee of Union and Progress. Turkish was made the official language among a people to whom Arabic, the language of the Prophet, is sacred. We might as well enforce English in the court at Basra, and it would be equally well understood. And this policy of repression was carried into religious matters. Shiahs were not admitted to Shiah law; Sunni law was forced on them. Consequently they avoided the court. Now matters which come under the Mohammedan law, disputes with regard to marriage, divorce, probate and administration and the like, are remitted to

a Mohammedan jurist. This system is appreciated by the mullahs, who receive large fees quite independently of the issue of the case, as well as by the litigants. Thus we develop the institutions of the country on their original lines and modify our code to suit the local conditions.

One may study the abstract principle of empire-building in the administrative offices at Basra; but for the concrete thing, the real pulse of the machine, go to Nasiriyeh, Qurna, Qalat Salih, or Amara. Abstract or concrete, the code is instinctive in the national character rather than calculated.

One more picture, which is in its way symbolical. In a provincial court a certain old lady—not of Nasiriyeh—brought a petition in a matter that was very near her heart. It was an ancient wrong; but with a new kind of judge she thought there might be some faint hope of redress; justice, after years of suppression, might emerge in her naked brightness from her wrappings of prejudice and corruption. This was exactly what happened, and the old lady so far forgot her composure that she stooped quickly and aimed a kiss at the top of the Deputy Military Governor's head. Happily for the dignity of this young officer, he saw it coming, dodged, and received the salute on the nape of his neck.

No doubt a generation will pass before the machine runs with perfect smoothness; but one may read into this scene a certain comforting allegorical suggestion.

But my recollections of Nasiriyeh are not happy. The five days I was there were spent in the most pestilential heat the garrison had endured since the occupation of the town. The thermometer rose to 118 degrees in the shade by the government reading under thatch, though the air was moist with the exudations of the drying swamp. I arrived during a funeral. The first sounds I heard were the "Last Post" on the bugle and the volley fired over an officer's grave. We bathed in the evening, but the

water was hotter than the air. There were deaths every day. It was on June 27th that I spent the morning in the court of the Military Governor. I was with him again in the evening, and he was in high spirits, as his leave was due after eighteen months in the country. He hoped to go down in the same boat with me on June 29th, and was only waiting for a telegram from headquarters before cabling to his wife. The next morning he was dead.

A young police officer, a boy of fine physique, took me to visit the Sabæans in their gardens by the river. I had fever on me, and was so weak that I could not walk a hundred yards without sitting down. The boy stood erect with an easy poise of strength which I envied. Soon after I reached Basra I heard that he was dead. Cholera had broken out—one more plague added to the normal pestilences of the place.

We called at Khamisiyeh on the way back, and took on board eighty sick from this small outpost. They were mostly men of the West Kents. Many of them, too weak to walk, were carried pick-a-back up the companion. They were emaciated with fever, dysentery, scurvy, jaundice, and other ills. As the Euphrates was falling, fresh water no longer reached them by the customary channel, and they had been reduced to the brackish well water of the desert. Their soiled kit added to their exhausted appearance—shirt white with the salt of perspiration, helmets, spine-pads and sun-guards half devoured by locusts, the flake of loose pith and cotton adhesive to their clothes and skin. The locusts were another plague, a local and passing one, of which I heard then for the first time.

The sun did not spare the sick. The second night we moored again at Qurna, and there were four deaths before morning.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE HOT WEATHER

On May 19th the Turks evacuated the Sinn position on the right bank, and we advanced the next morning and occupied their abandoned lines from Magasis Fort to Imam Ali Mansur and the Dujaila Redoubt. The enemy, by contracting their front, released troops to oppose the advance of Baratoff, who with 5,000 cavalry and 4,000 infantry was marching on Khanikin. There had been considerable perturbation in Baghdad for the safety of the city, an anxiety that was only relieved by the fall of Kut. The surrender of the garrison reinforced the enemy at Khanikin by the addition of the 2nd Division, which was withdrawn from Sinn, and the 6th Division, which was on its way to join Khalil Bey's army on the Tigris, and which was expected at Shumran in the middle of May.

Baratoff twice attacked the Turks, inflicting losses on them in spite of the new divisions, which increased their strength to 23,000 men. He then withdrew to the Persian frontier and engaged the enemy in an eight days' battle on the Taq-i-Garra Pass, whence he fell back in turn on Kerind, Kermanshah and Hamadan. It was a deliberate and orderly retirement, for the Turks had suffered too much at the Cossacks' hands to press them closely. Baratoff had effected his object in containing a considerable force which would otherwise have been operating against the Russian army to the north of Mosul, or against our own force on the Tigris. In his retirement he still played the same useful rôle, drawing

enemy troops from the more essential theatre of the war, though at some sacrifice of political prestige. In July the Russians took up their stand at Sultan Bulagh, blocking all further advance of the Turks in the direction of the capital, and threatening the flank of any force marching on Isfahan.

Towards the end of August Baratoff received reinforcements. In the meantime a Russian force under Chernobuzoff had pushed through from Urumiah and defeated the Turks at Lalgan on August 23rd, when the whole of the Turkish 11th Division and two battalions of the 10th were captured. The Turks, threatened in their rear, withdrew; the pressure on Baratoff was relieved; and in September the Russians were again within twenty miles of Hamadan.

When Kut fell the withdrawal of the Turkish 2nd Division reduced their force on the Tigris to three divisions, the 52nd, 51st and 45th. Their total strength probably never exceeded 16,000 rifles during the whole summer. But the excessive heat made military operations impossible. Our troops were exhausted with sickness—fever, dysentery, boils, cholera, jaundice, scurvy. They were often on short rations. Vegetables were not to be had. It was no fault of the commissariat that the potato supply rotted before it reached Basra, or that the local flora failed to make good; but poverty of diet played havoc with the troops. There was a kind of shrub, the commonest weed in this alkaline waste, which, when the salt was well boiled out of it, was served up as a vegetable. Pessimists called it "Nebuchadnezzar," optimists "spinach," but it did not save our sepoys from scurvy. There are two articles of diet which the Indian cannot forgo, or which he could not forgo before the Great War made the impossible not merely possible but normal, and these are milk and *gaur* (sugar). For weeks at a time during the hot weather of 1916 he had to exist

without either. The British Tommy had the staple diet of the soldier—bully beef, a dish which, when dry and stringy, and unrelieved by any vegetable seasoning, is only palatable in the extreme phases of hunger. Beef, of course, is anathema to the Hindu. Death is spiritually, even physically, preferable. And to the Mohammedans meat out of a tin is unclean, because there is no evidence that the animal has been *halal-ed*,[1] or butchered in the orthodox way prescribed by the Prophet. The diet of the sepoy during these days was *atta* (flour), unsavoured by any sweet stuff. Fresh meat was rarely to be had. In consequence scurvy set in. Fifty[2] per cent. of the Indian soldiers suffered from it at one time or other.

The average strength of a division between May and June was 5,000. Every week 2,500 were evacuated at the clearing hospital at Sheikh Saad. In a month 15,000 sick left Basra for India, apart from the thousands who crowded every hospital in the country. Four months of reverses, the fruitless sacrifice of lives, the malignant complicity of the weather, the failure to relieve Kut did not contribute the stiffening which body and spirit needed against the malice of the dog days. The sun when he is strong and one has no adequate defence against him is the most relentless, untiring enemy that man can have. One's skin becomes an infliction, one's blood a curse, one's tongue and throat a torture, the stomach a leaden burden, all the five senses avenues of offence. His malice appears personal and rational, and he admits no truce. A few minutes before five he has you out of bed, and for fourteen hours he employs his engines against you until you find that each part of your organism is contrived to satisfy his hate. One day in May, as Doughty would have said,

[1] Slain by a stroke at the throat.

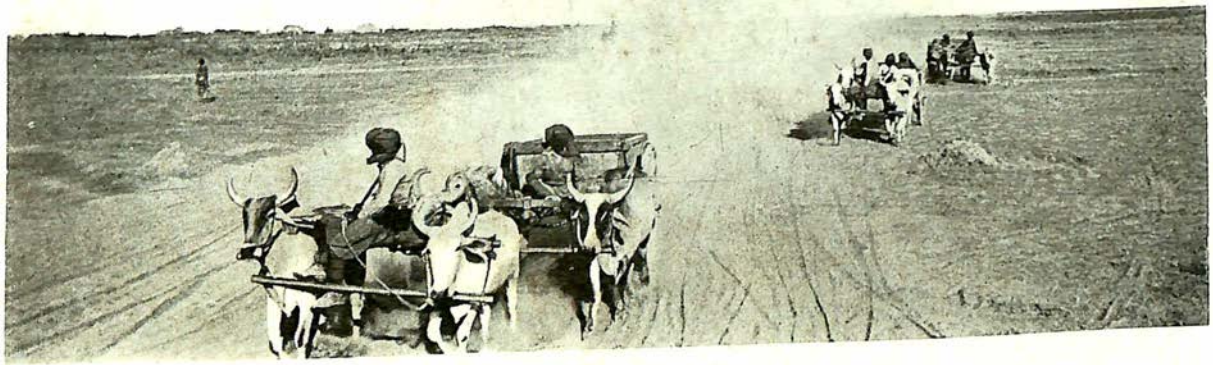
[2] I met no regimental O.C. or medical officer who estimated the cases of scurvy among the Indian troops at less than 50 per cent. In some cases the estimate was as high as 80 per cent. Very few of these were fit for duty again within six months of entering hospital.

is "a long death without a dying." One's imagination is depressed by a cycle of them. There are thirty in a month; five times thirty must be endured before the troops can reasonably look for refreshment. And that is next door to a life sentence.

The record temperature in the shade under board and thatch was 125 degrees, but this meant 130 degrees in tents. In heat like this there was nothing to do but to lie down and pant and pour water over one's head. A sun-helmet, of course, was necessary under canvas, and it was often the only article of clothing one retained. A number of regiments had arrived in the country with their single-fly bell tents. The gradual substitution for these of the English pattern type, 18 feet by 16 feet, was a welcome relief; but with our limited transport many units had to wait till nearly the end of the hot weather for them. In more or less stationary camps—Corps, Divisional, and Brigade Headquarters—well excavated dug-outs 6 feet below ground, with air passages and a reed covering, afforded some refuge from the heat. The reed matting of the country deflects the sun and reduces the temperature in a tent several degrees, but it was not so easily come by at the front, where it was most needed, as lower down on the lines of communication. The trenches, of course, were intolerably close, and no one thought of walking up a communication trench in the heat of the day. One walked outside. The common enemy compelled an armistice.

Our casualties from the sun alone when we advanced on May 20th to occupy the abandoned Sinn position proved, if any proof were needed, that there was no alternative but to mark time till the cold weather.

The column started at 4 A.M., reached the Dujaila Redoubt at ten, and Imam Ali Mansur at two in the afternoon. It was a 16-mile trek. The water in the bottles gave out, and there was not enough in the lorries



DUST.

to go round. After ten o'clock men were dropping every few yards; they simply pitched over and lay where they fell. I have a picture of a doctor and a padre sitting beside a maniac whose helmet had fallen off, and who was beyond physical or spiritual ministration. Seven in one regiment died. Some succumbed in the transport carts as they were being taken to the ambulance, others died of exhaustion as they were being lifted out. The sun was strong enough to warp a board of wood in half an hour. A sapper who wore a puggri which protected the crown of his head without giving shade to his brow came in with his forehead blistered and swollen like a bulb. The air was so dry that the dead Turks who still lay out at Beit Aieesa burst into flame if you put a match to them. Two nights later a draft of eighty came up from Arab Village. Half of them had just been released from hospital; the others were raw recruits who had arrived straight from home. They halted at Abu Roman and started again at midnight with a convoy, but not one arrived with the transport carts at Dujaila the next morning. The men dropped out one by one in the dark, and lay strewn out all over the desert. The only impulse of the spirit which could stir the flesh drove them in the direction of water. Those who could walk made a bee line for the Tigris. To men suffering the extremities of thirst sudden death is a minor evil. The carts dumped their loads and came back for them in the morning, performing the office of an ambulance on the battlefield. Those who could not help themselves were given a lift; the others eased themselves of their kit and hung on to the wagons. But the *drabi* had to carry on. Necessity allows him no respite, for the convenient maxim holds that in a tight place his resources are inexhaustible. The carts made the journey back to Abu Roman at night and fell into the hands of the "Buddoos." Only one driver out of five reached camp, alive but with two wounds. He first

watered his mules, and then blissfully bathed his wounded head and thigh in the river.

The cursed country continued to receive, consume, invalidate and reject draft after draft of our best blood. It had become a mouth which we fed reluctantly, but lavishly, with the manhood which was essential elsewhere. No effort was spared by Government to keep the force up to strength or to improve the health of our men. The charge of niggardliness, in 1916 at any rate, was false. Economy was not considered, whether in money or in men. But it was too late. In May it was realised that it would be humanly impossible to secure sufficient river transport before the next cold weather. Yet for political reasons we had to hold the barren ground we had gained, and to keep up a line of communications over 300 miles from our base. One could fill chapters with statistics showing the wastage this entailed. Everyone who has first-hand evidence can multiply instances. There is not a regiment or a unit which cannot add its melancholy item to the bill. New drafts coming up the river lost more than half their effectives before they reached the gap they had to fill. Other drafts succeeded and succumbed in their turn. *Item:* A draft of 139 men of the Highland Light Infantry arrived at Basra and reached the front 28 strong. Few of them had ever been south of Cromartie before they enlisted, and some had never seen a train. *Item:* The three Indian battalions of the 19th Brigade went into the trenches in July with only five British officers. *Item:* A howitzer battery with seven men to man the six guns. Sixty is the normal strength, leaving a hundred for the wagon lines. *Item:* A monitor at Amara put out of action by the sun. All the engine-room crew were down with heat-stroke. *Item:* A commanding officer and a temporary lieutenant to run a hospital with a thousand patients. I heard of dozens of cases which I cannot verify, but which are probably little,

if at all, exaggerated. For in June and July the odds were evens against the hardened veteran making the journey upstream without going sick, and at least two to one against the unseasoned recruit.

Many men and officers were left in hospitals on the way, or went sick as soon as they reached their destination, and were invalided out of the country before they had put in a day's work. In some boats the officers' accommodation was the small space of deck in front of the bridge. They fed and slept in these narrow limits, often under a single awning, and exposed to the full glare of the sun the whole day. Side awnings were, of course, impracticable, as they would obscure the view from the bridge. The only escape was to lie in the water hanging on to a rope between the ship and the barge, or to sit on a stool wrapped in a wet sheet. Officers and men, British soldiers and sepoys, took their turn in the stream; for the sun penetrated the Indian's hardened skull, and he was only less immune from heat-stroke than the white man.[1] The troops were littered on the barges, or on the main deck behind the bridge, so tightly packed that they could not move without stepping over one another, and shut off from what little breeze there was.

The boats were always crowded going upstream, and nearly as crowded with sick going down. A medical officer at Amara told me that at the worst time they disembarked an average of eight corpses a day from the boats bound for the base. The sick were in a parlous state. All the amenities and decencies of the hospital ward had to be disregarded, for in spite of every effort

[1] A friend wrote to me from hospital after making the journey upstream in June: "The ship's engineer, an Indian medical officer, and an Egyptian interpreter went down with heat-stroke, and had to be landed at an intermediate station. The interpreter's stroke affected him in the form of nausea, and he added to our gaiety by substituting his helmet for the more conventional basin. Another officer went down later in the voyage, bleeding freely from the nose, and was kept going by being swabbed down by orderlies of his regiment, who moved his bed from one side of the deck to the other to dodge the sun."

to increase the medical staff in Mesopotamia it was impossible to secure enough doctors and orderlies to cope with the sick as they poured in, or to staff the hospitals and river boats at the same time. Gradually the personnel was brought up to strength, but it took a long time, and the transport for the sick was never satisfactory.

Perhaps the most ironic item of all was the batch of ninety doctors who landed at Basra on May 15th. In three months ten had died and forty had been invalided out of the country. For cumulative wastage this reminds one of the stretcher-bearers at Sannaiyat, who "couldn't get a move on" because as soon as they got near a wounded man one of their own lot was hit, so that they spent the whole day bringing one another in.

Only three things happened on the Tigris during the hot weather, of sufficient importance and interest to impress themselves on the memory of the force—the occupation of the Sinn position on the right bank; the arrival of the Cossack squadron at Ali Gharbi; and the destruction of the three ammunition barges by the enemy's gun-fire at Falahiyeh.

A great deal of political capital was made out of the Cossacks' ride to Ali Gharbi. There were people at home who believed that the British and Russian flanks had joined up at last and were enveloping the Turk. The adventure had no material results, but it was more than a piece of bravado. It was worth while of only to impress neutrals, to increase the name of the Cossack among the Arabs and Turks, to cheer us up on the Tigris, and to prove to the sepoy that our ally on the other side of the hills was no shadow but a substantial fact.

The Cossacks, a sotnia of 125 horse, with ten pack animals, left Mahidasht, twenty miles west by south of Kermanshah, on the evening of May 8th, and covered the 180 miles to Ali Gharbi at the rate of twenty-four miles a day while on the march. They made a halt of

two and a half days at the court of the Wali of Pusht-i-Kuh. This chief had maintained his neutrality, but enemy forces were likely to be encountered at any moment, as the country traversed was infested by hostile tribesmen. Their guide was untrustworthy. When he had aroused their suspicions by frequent attempts to mislead them, he had to point the way with a rope round his neck. On one occasion the party entered a village half an hour after a superior force of mounted tribesmen, officered by Germans, had left it.

The march was a fine test of our Ally's resource, mobility, and endurance. They crossed passes over 8,000 feet high. The track was rough and mountainous and difficult even for mules; two horses were lost over precipices. The Cossacks travel light. For transport they had less than one pack animal for ten men; these carried ammunition, cooking-pots, and a small tent for officers. Beyond a few simple necessaries the men had no other kit than what they stood up in.[1]

When they had consumed their three days' rations they lived on the country. For ambulance they had one assistant-surgeon provided with medical wallets. But they were a hard lot, and none of them fell sick. Their last march which brought them in to Ali Gharbi was one of thirty miles. Five of their horses died of thirst and exhaustion on the parched desert between the foothills and the Tigris. It was dark when they reached camp; yet after the dinner which was given in their honour they were singing and dancing all night, and they did not turn in till after one in the morning. The arrival of the

[1] The Cossack sleeps where he can, without tents. He carries a rifle, sabre, water-bottle, haversack, 60 rounds of ammunition; his greatcoat, waterproof sheet, and horse blanket are rolled up behind the saddle. His horse's food is carried in a pair of wallets that will take 15 lb. of grain. The remainder of his outfit, 240 rounds of ammunition, one day's bread, shirt, drawers, curry-comb, and brush, go into two saddle-bags attached behind the stirrup leathers. He rides with a straight leg on a narrow saddle much lighter than ours. Altogether the Cossack's mount gets off much more lightly than the British troop horse, which often has to carry 18 stone.

Cossacks made a cheery interval in the tedium of the hot weather. They were all picked horsemen, and they gave some remarkable performances of trick riding. The officers of the party were invited to Basra, where they were entertained by the Army Commander and decorated with the Military Cross. They left Ali Gharbi to rejoin Baratoff on June 4th. The ride back after their presence had become known involved greater risks; but they escaped ambuscades and got through without a casualty. Another sotnia of one hundred horse which came out to look for them were enfiladed in a pass on the outskirts of the Wali's territory and lost sixty killed and six prisoners.

Owing to shortage of shells the Turkish artillery were seldom so active as ours, but when they discovered an objective worth spending ammunition on they made good shooting. On June 10th the enemy, who had brought their heavy guns up to an advanced position at Sannaiyat, opened fire at six in the morning at our ammunition barges lying in the bend of the river at Falahiyeh. The fire was directed by a small aeroplane dropping smoke bombs, with a fighting machine guarding its flanks and probably signalling by wireless, for the registration was remarkably good. The Turkish Intelligence was generally efficient. In this case it was believed that the position was given away by the exchanged prisoners who were moored a few hundred yards from the ammunition dump on their way upstream. Other enemy batteries diverted attention from the main issue by shelling the trenches, corps headquarters, and brigade camps at the same time.

Owing to the strength of the current the barges were very securely anchored both on land and in the water, and could not be easily released. A gallant attempt was made by Captain MacIlwaine, Staff captain to the B.G.R.A. He galloped up from Headquarters, boarded the barge, and called in the aid of Seaman-Gunner Barnsley, who brought his tug-boat alongside. MacIlwaine, when he

had cut away the ropes connecting the barges, called out to Barnsley to steam ahead. But it was impossible to cast off. The anchor was fixed to steel chain hawsers riveted to the barge, and had no slip wires. Captain Martin, the O.C. of the barges, who was working a mile upstream, arrived just in time to see the first hit on the hindmost barge, which caught fire. The damage was done now and the barges were doomed. MacIlwaine rushed to the nullah where he had left his horse, and crouching under the belly of the beast, escaped by a miracle.

There was some interval between each shot. The first round fell in the water a few yards ahead of the barge, deluging the crew, who were washing clothes on the bank. The second fell twenty yards off on the ground. The third and fourth fell behind. No doubt the Turkish gunners thought the barge would be moving off. The sixth and seventh round fell very close. The eighth was a direct hit on the hindmost barge, an inflammable, high-explosive 5.9 shell fired at 7,000 yards. The matting caught fire, and the barge burst into flames. There was a conveniently deep nullah close by in which the involuntary spectators on the bank had taken cover. In a few minutes the barge exploded, setting fire to the other two, and it rained ship and shell within a radius of half a mile. Eight hundred tons of ammunition were destroyed. Some shells burst in the air, some on the ground. One struck a monitor, pierced the deck, and fell into the magazine, but did not burst. The capstan was hurled 400 yards from the barge and buried itself flush with the ground. All through the night and the next morning shells were bursting on the ground as the flaming débris spread. A subaltern in the 13th Division told me that it was "the most magnificent pyrotechnical display ever seen." It provided a spectacle as far as Sheikh Saad. The ordnance of the 3rd and 13th Divisions was destroyed. The supply depot was ignited, but the fire was extinguished. In the

transport lines there was a stampede. Those of the mules that did not break loose had to be released. Boosa was burning; carts were destroyed; smouldering packing-cases, tarpaulins, matting, were strewn on the ground as kindling for unexploded ammunition. The next morning the crew of the barge, aided by a fatigue party, cleared up. It was creepy work collecting live shell from half-extinguished ashes, but the total casualties, from the first round fired to the last round picked up, only amounted to two mules and one man.

There was significance in the sensation caused by the blowing up of the barges. That an event which would have been forgotten in a week in any other theatre of the war, or in Mesopotamia during the crowded days of the advance on Baghdad, should be the subject of discussion for months afterwards only points to the dead level of monotony to which we had fallen. Little happened beyond the incidents of mortality and disease to occupy the mind of the troops during the hot weather. And it was a monotony that killed. The lot of the British soldier is a hard one when he has nothing to fall back upon. It was easier to greet the lark or wake with a song in France or Greece, where there was always some kind of food for the mind. Shops, farms, crops, cattle, ships, houses, flowers, trees, womankind, faces in the street, cafés, markets—the rank and file may not have been conscious of mental refreshment in these things, but collectively they made up an atmosphere and dispelled gloom. In Mesopotamia there was nothing in the way of everyday sights or in the people of the country to stimulate the imagination. There was neither tree nor stone. The Arab—not that we missed him—was never seen in the camp. Monotony reigned incarnate on the mud banks of the Tigris. Yet the spirit of the soldier, or his pride, or his sense of humour, discovered some sort of lenitive by which he was able to survive.

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